Finding the Solution to the Problem: Dental Access For Alabama's Children

Conference Proceedings

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Siegelman Reaffirms Support for Programs  
To Increase Dental Access for Alabama Children

MONTGOMERY — Governor Don Siegelman today reaffirmed his support for state-based efforts to decrease the number of Alabama children suffering from poor oral health and its consequences as the Alabama Dental Summit opened a two day session here to explore new ideas to address the problem.

“Good oral health is essential for every child to reach his full potential,” Gov. Siegelman said. “I am committed to ensuring the well-being of every child in Alabama and welcome this opportunity to continue the Smile Alabama! Initiative by looking further at ways to make dental care more available to children.”

Increasing the number of Alabama children who get the dental care they need is the focus of the Alabama Dental Summit, a select, invitation-only group of 75 civic, health and government leaders meeting here this week to shape new initiatives to address dental access issues in the state. The Alabama Dental Summit will bring together some of the nation’s top experts in oral health policy and legislation with a diverse group of child health advocates to identify opportunities to increase the number of Alabama children who get the dental care they need. Participants will include public and private dental providers, physicians, and representatives of civic, faith-based, education, health and other organizations.

Of the state’s 1.2 million children under age 21, nearly 400,000 children qualify for dental services through Medicaid but have limited access due to a shortage of dental providers enrolled in Medicaid. Other children who have no insurance or are underinsured for dental services also miss out on preventive or other basic dental care. As a result, an estimated 39 percent of all school-age children in Alabama have untreated cavities and account for more than 25,000 missed school days each year.
Recent studies have established poor oral health in children as a significant problem in the United States. Poor oral health is the most common disease of childhood, affecting five times as many children as asthma. Children with untreated caries often suffer from chronic pain, resulting in poor nutrition, inability to sleep, and missed school. Many of these children never experience a day without pain. The U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on Oral Health revealed that 50 percent of children age five to nine have at least one cavity or filling and that 80 percent of low income children receive no preventive dental care. Sponsors of the Alabama Dental Summit include the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, National Governors’ Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s 21st Century Challenge Fund matching grants program, and the Alabama Medicaid Agency.

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Alabama Dental Summit Report Page

Preface

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Perspective of the Speakers

Facilitators

Workgroup Summaries and Recommendations

Obtaining Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Identification of Funding Resources

Building Public Awareness

Surveillance/Monitoring System Development

Statistical Information

Alabama Dental Statistics

County Profiles

Appendix

Measuring Our Progress

Alabama Oral Health Strategic Plan

Alabama Oral Health Policy Team
Preface

Let’s Make It Add Up!

You are not healthy without good oral health.

Four years have passed since state health leaders, provider associations and child health advocates collectively accepted the challenge of creating an oral health care system in Alabama that could meet the needs of all children in the state. During that time, many promising efforts have taken place and real progress has been made. For example, there were 100 more Medicaid dental providers in 2001 than in 2000, thanks to an aggressive outreach effort, a dental fee increase, grant support and a new spirit of collaboration among dental providers, Medicaid and others.

Paperwork and Medicaid claims filing issues were addressed and a patient education plan was implemented through the Smile Alabama Initiative. In Fiscal Year 2001, approximately 20,000 more children covered by Medicaid received at least one dental care service than in the previous year.
While these initial efforts have met with success, they also have underscored many of the gaps that continue to exist within Alabama’s dental care system. For example, many counties – typically small, rural counties – do not have a dental provider or are significantly underserved. There are many pervasive social, economic and behavioral issues that create barriers to care as well. This was at the forefront as plans for Alabama’s first Dental Summit were made. This included a realization that good oral health outcomes go beyond recruiting providers, and beyond producing education materials. Resolving this issue means that gaps in Alabama’s dental care infrastructure and barriers to good oral health must be remedied with substantive change.

Approximately 75 Dental Summit participants joined together in December 2001 to hear presentations from nationally-recognized leaders in oral health, but also to work intensively to develop specific recommendations. These recommendations were received by the Alabama Oral Health Policy Team which subsequently incorporated many of them into the state’s Oral Health Strategic Plan, creating a blueprint for realistic action. Every day in Alabama, children suffer the painful consequences of untreated cavities or poor oral health. An estimated 39 percent of Alabama school children have untreated cavities, causing an estimated 25,650 missed school days each year. Approximately 80 percent of all children do not get the preventive care they need to head off dental problems. Add to this equation the fact that there are too few dental providers and too many children who need care, and it is easy to see that the numbers just don’t add up – yet. The challenge that lies ahead is to take the steps necessary to address the work force, education and other barriers identified during the Dental Summit that will ultimately result in all Alabama children getting the dental care they need. This will enable them to have good overall health, to be more available for learning and eventually, to become productive citizens.
While the majority of children have excellent oral health, low income and minority children are significantly more likely to suffer illness, pain and difficulties due to tooth decay, according to Dr. James J. Crall, director of the HRSA/MCHB National Oral Health Policy Center at Columbia University.

As a result, policy makers and health officials must break this cycle with a multi-tiered response where expenditures for advanced restorative care and catastrophic care are reduced through a program of diagnosis, disease management and preventive care.

Dr. Crall, one of four national oral health experts participating in the Alabama Dental Summit, challenged the audience in his initial remarks to see problems associated with poor oral health as chronic, complex, but solvable problems. In the past, a more simplistic view of the problem first led to a response largely based on filling cavities, and later, a “one size fits all” prevention focus, he said. Now, a greater understanding of the problem and the need to target dental interventions to at-risk populations call for a different response, one that reaches children earlier and in an individualized and a more strategic manner.
Dr. Crall urged participants to look separately at the disease itself and the services children need. “You can reduce dental disease by getting kids into services, but you can reduce disease in ways other than getting kids into services,” he said. “You can do it through educational programs, oral health promotion, and a lot of public health kinds of things, such as water fluoridation. We need to disentangle those two things and to get more strategic in our approach,” he said, adding that states and communities that have adopted a more strategic approach are more likely to be making real progress.

To make progress, dental decay must be viewed not as a rare situation, but as one of the most common chronic childhood diseases, he said. Even in affluent preschoolers aged 2 - to 5-years old, 45 percent of tooth decay is untreated. However, by late adolescence, 35 percent of low income children have untreated dental disease while their more affluent counterparts have obtained needed dental care.

Dr. Crall further defined the problem by focusing on several key elements surrounding access to dental care. While funding for programs such as Medicaid, is a top issue, other oral health concerns include workforce issues, the prevalence, distribution and severity of dental disease, coverage issues, access and utilization, financial resources, program administration, cultural barriers and societal views about dental care generally.

Dr. Crall was appointed as director of Columbia University’s Oral Health Disparities and Policy Center in September 2000 and is the director of the HRSA/MCHB National Oral Health Policy Center. He has been the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry’s Child Advocate since 1995. He received a doctor of dental surgery, master’s degree and certificate in pediatric dentistry from the University of Iowa, and is a Diplomate of the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry.

**Having Medicaid doesn’t always translate into access**

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to care."
We know that funding of these programs has been an issue, but it is not the only issue,” Dr. Crall emphasized. Funding, he explained, plays a pivotal role in provider acceptance of Medicaid patients and must be market-based or risk being a financial disincentive. He noted that expanding the pool of providers takes time and will follow a predictable process beginning with current providers increasing the number of procedures they do, followed by acceptance of more patients. Subsequently, additional providers will enroll and participate. To retain dentists, however, reimbursement levels must keep pace with the providers’ costs. Workforce issues are central to the modern-day dental dilemma, Dr. Crall explained, pointing to the proportional decline of dentists to the general population that has occurred since the early 1990s. Other factors have contributed to a shrinking dental workforce as well. Overall, he noted, dentists are older and as they age out, they are not being replaced. Another factor that is contributing to the problem is that 80 percent of all dental providers are general dentists who are typically more comfortable with older children. A related workforce issue that must be considered is that minority utilization is directly related to the density of providers as compared to the general population and that people are more likely to get care from those they associate with or consider to be part of their peer group. This is a problem, he explained, because minorities are underrepresented in dental schools, due to the expense of attending and other related issues. Another contributing factor is that no more than half of all community centers –
where poor children often get health care – have
dental clinics. Consequently, most dentists are busy and appointments
are hard to get. And with most dentists working in small or solo practices, increasing patient workloads is not always possible.
To change this, Dr. Crall encouraged the group to work with local dental associations to help increase local capacity because dentists are most likely to be influenced by their peers.
From a policy standpoint, he emphasized that prevention is an important long-term strategy for reducing the need for restorative procedures.
However, the treatment of active, often severe disease for large numbers of children cannot be ignored.
“Prevention is a complement, not a substitute for treatment,” he emphasized.
On the epidemiological side, Dr. Crall observed that approximately 20 to 25 percent of minority children experienced 80 percent of all dental carries. In addition, they are more likely to have decay, have more decayed teeth with more severe decay and have more untreated tooth decay than white kids at all income levels.
Some of this, he said, is because until recently, most children did not go to the dentist until they started school. Now, policies have changed. “The science is there that shows that early dental care is good for all kids,” he said. “But it is the at-risk kids who really need it early, to nip it (dental disease) in the bud.”
Unlike other chronic, childhood diseases that can be prevented with an immunization, dental disease in children is different, he explained. “We know that dental disease is highly preventable. It is not uniformly preventable nor is it easily preventable,” Dr. Crall said, estimating that the 20 percent of Medicaid-eligible children who need advanced restorative care or who have
catastrophic dental needs use 75 percent of program resources. He added that this does not include children who require hospitalization, anesthesia or potent IV antibiotics to resolve their dental problems.

“If we can do something about these kids, if we For a lot of people in our society, it (oral health) is a nonissue... Their kids don’t look like the kids covered in the program. It takes a while for them to get it, that these are American kids who live in your state that we’re talking about, not children from a third world country.

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Alabama Dental Summit Report Page

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can shift them out of these categories to something more manageable, there’s a lot of savings there,” Dr. Crall said. “You will have much better access because you don’t have to go to a pediatric specialist, and more (general) dentists will be able to take care of them. When access improves, kids’
health will be better.”

He pointed to numerous national studies that illustrate the significant oral health disparities that currently exist. For example, data from the Health Care Financing Administration (now Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) showed that only one in five Medicaid-eligible children received preventive services in 1993. Other national statistics indicate that while dental care expenditures account for more than 20 percent of pediatric health care expenditures only 2 percent of Medicaid pediatric health expenditures go for dental care.

“And we know that these kids have a lot of dental disease,” Dr. Crall emphasized.

Part of the access problem is rooted in the lack of dental coverage for poor and near-poor children. Many of these children have health or medical insurance, but no way to pay for dental care.

National studies show that for every child who lacks medical coverage, 2.6 children lack dental coverage. Coverage, too, doesn’t always result in care.

“Having Medicaid doesn’t always translate into access to care,” he said.

Cultural barriers, too, may prevent many children from accessing the system. Growing numbers of Hispanic and other minority populations have given rise to parents who do not understand how to obtain care or why they should obtain dental care for their children. This is particularly the case when English is not the primary language in the home.

“It is not intuitively obvious how to get into the American health care system,” Dr. Crall observed. “This is what is fueling a greater prevalence of disease in this population and what contributes to less treatment when there is disease.”

Societal barriers may affect many more children, he said. The issues of access and poor oral health are often hard for lawmakers and others to understand, especially as they relate to low-income children.

“For a lot of people in our society, it (oral health)
is a non-issue,” Dr. Crall said. “Their kids don’t look like the kids covered in the program. It takes a while for them to get it, that these are American kids who live in your state that we’re talking about, not children from a third world country.”

He urged state leaders and providers not to blame people for their circumstances, but instead work with programs such as Medicaid to educate and help them. For example, even though maternity programs may offer educational materials to new parents, those parents may not understand what steps to take to ensure that their young children have good oral health.

“We all pretty much know the science, what’s best for kids. But you can’t make that assumption that parents will know what to do and a lot of this has to be thought of as an education process,” he emphasized.

“Some folks are going to need more help in that regard.”

He emphasized that there are things “in the bag” now that will work, if they are used and applied properly, so that there is a closer match of providers’ expectations and patients’ understanding of how the whole process works.

While there is no “quick fix” to the country’s dental dilemma, Dr. Crall emphasized that steps taken recently in Alabama and elsewhere demonstrate that progress can be made in reducing oral health disparities in children.

“Things that are being done here and in other states are giving people a lot more optimism that this is a solvable problem and that strides can be made if people start to learn from one another, talk to each other, collaborate and work hard to make things happen,” he said.

The Status of Oral Health in Alabama

Stuart A. Lockwood, DMD, MPH

Stuart A. Lockwood, DMD, MPH
Alabama’s state dental director at the Department of Public Health served with the Division of Oral Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 12 years before returning home to Alabama. Dr. Lockwood is a graduate of Auburn University and the University of Alabama School of Dentistry. He received a master’s degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham with a double major in dental public health and epidemiology, and was a National Research Award fellow in oral epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of Public Health/Program in Dental Public Health before joining CDC in 1989.

Every day in Alabama, children experience severe pain, miss school or suffer infections, tooth loss or other health problems due to inadequate access to dental care in the state. Eliminating these “avoidable failures” and improving children’s oral health in Alabama will require that state leaders, the dental provider community, child health advocates and others to think creatively, to eliminate barriers and to forge new alliances, according to State Dental Director Dr. Stuart Lockwood.

According to Dr. Lockwood, dental disease in children continues to be a widespread problem in Alabama even though the rate of dental disease has been greatly reduced in the last 30 years. For example, in the state’s 1990-91 dental survey, approximately 63 percent of all Alabama school children aged 5 to 17 years had experienced at least one cavity. Other available data suggest that about 40 percent, or 312,000 Alabama children aged 5 to 17, have untreated dental caries or tooth decay, and about 20,000, or 7 percent, need urgent care. The problem is particularly acute for those children who live in rural areas or who are African-American. Thousands of Alabama children experience tooth decay that could have been easily prevented with good oral health habits, regular dental care and use of dental sealants, a protective plastic material placed on the biting part of the tooth. Dr. Lockwood noted that dental sealants are particularly effective in preventing tooth decay, and can provide up to 100 percent protection to treated tooth surfaces, if the sealant is maintained. However, only one in five Alabama children has received one or more dental sealants to prevent tooth decay, most from more affluent families.

“There is a ten-fold difference in the percent of children with at least one sealant by looking at income and level of education,” he said.

While limited access to care is a major issue, the lack of early dental care by children at all income levels is also a major factor in the oral health of Alabama’s children.
For example, Dr. Lockwood noted that many infants and toddlers have decay before age two, but the prevailing view of many general dentists is that dental care isn’t needed until later. “It appears that the older you get, the more treatment you get. The perception is that younger children don’t need dental care,” he said, also noting that many Alabama dentists are not comfortable working with younger children.

As he provided an overview of state-level issues, Dr. Lockwood pointed to recent news reports and a report card rating from Oral Health America that ranked Alabama and the United States poorly in terms of access to dental care. While the access to care in Alabama, particularly for adults, is “dismal,” Dr. Lockwood expressed optimism that improvements can be made that will make a difference for children, emphasizing that use of sealants, community water fluoridation and proper toothbrushing twice a day has the potential to change the long-term oral health outcomes for thousands of Alabama children.

Alabama’s Response

Mary G. McIntyre, MD, MPH

A lot of people think that teeth don’t matter . . . This is the myth we have to overcome in this state if we expect to make a difference.
One does not plan and then try to make circumstances fit those plans. One tries to make the plans fit the circumstances.
— General George Patton

Significant progress is being made in Alabama to increase access to dental care for children, but much work remains before all children are able to receive the prevention and treatment services they need to enjoy a healthy life.

Dr. Mary G. McIntyre, Associate Medical Director for the Alabama Medicaid Agency, credited the collective efforts of a diverse group of providers, government leaders, child health advocates and others who have worked together to improve children’s access to dental care in the state. At the same time, targeted rate increases and an aggressive outreach effort have played a key role in recruiting dental providers.

Alabama’s responses to the compelling oral health needs of children, including the Smile Alabama! Initiative, have been successful to date because of the involvement of providers, state health officials, child advocates and others, she emphasized. She also praised the financial and technical support of the National Governors’ Association that has enabled state leaders to create the Alabama Oral Health Policy Team, an Oral Health Strategic Plan and the Oral Health Coalition of Alabama. Grant support from the 21st Century Challenge Fund program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has also been instrumental through the funding two dental outreach workers, educational materials and provider support activities.

“Once we got all the groups to sit down together and put together a plan, we realized that we needed a way to pay for it. Their support helped make this possible,” she said, emphasizing that the Smile Alabama! Initiative and the efforts of the policy team and task force are on behalf of all Alabama children, not just those on Medicaid.

During the past four years, the Alabama Medicaid Agency has worked to bring various groups together to build support for expanding the dental care system in the state. Beginning in 1998, Medicaid’s Dental Task Force has explored changes and ideas to make Medicaid more “provider-friendly” while adhering to federal rules and guidelines.
You have to make sure people understand it is not about a pretty smile. It is about healthy children and healthy people.”

By listening to providers and incorporating their suggestions into decisions on policy and procedures, the Agency has been able to make numerous improvements to the dental program. “For example,” she explained, “dentists told us that rates can go up, but it doesn’t make any difference if you can’t get your claims through the system to get paid.” To address those issues identified by providers, Medicaid staff became actively involved by making personal visits to dentists’ offices, loading claim-filing software, working with Medicaid’s fiscal agent and taking any steps necessary to resolve outstanding problems. Coupled with an across the board rate increase, all of the efforts have paid off, with more than 100 new providers enrolling with Medicaid in the first year of the Smile Alabama! Initiative, she said. As a result there are now 11 Alabama counties that have either one Medicaid dental provider or no providers who participate in Medicaid. To help families of Medicaid-eligible children who are at risk of having severe tooth decay or poor access to care, the Agency now covers targeted case management services. Case managers are typically social workers who seek to help children and families overcome barriers to care, ranging from transportation issues to understanding
how a dental office operates.
“It doesn’t matter if you have providers out
there if the families don’t know where they are or
how to get to them. That has to be an important
piece of it,” she said.
In addition, patient education is a core component
of the Smile Alabama! Initiative, according to
Dr. McIntyre. A year-long cooperative venture with
the state Broadcasters’
Association
is providing
guaranteed airtime
on television
and radio for three
public service
announcements
that emphasize the
need for dental
health care and the
importance of
good oral health
habits. Promotional
and educational
materials have been developed for providers
to use as well. Posters, appointment reminder
cards and easy-to-read educational materials are
free to Medicaid-enrolled providers.
However, funding and administrative issues
are only part of the oral health problem in the state,
she observed. Attitudes and perceptions regarding
oral health are often part of the problem as well.
“A lot of people think that teeth don’t matter,”
she said. “This is the myth we have to overcome in
this state if we expect to make a difference. You
have to make sure people understand it is not
about a pretty smile. It is about healthy children
and healthy people.”

Alabama’s Oral Health Strategic Plan
Mary Lynne Hartselle Capilouto, DMD, SM
To ensure every child in Alabama
enjoys optimal health by providing
equal and timely access to quality,
comprehensive oral health care, where
prevention is emphasized promoting
the total well-being of the child.

Vision Statement
Implementation of Alabama’s Oral Health Strategic Plan will play a key role in expanding access to dental care in the state, according to Dr. Mary Lynne Capilouto, dean of the University of Alabama Dental School and a member of the Alabama Oral Health Policy Team. To be successful, however, all efforts must focus on achieving the vision as developed by the policy team, a “true team” of 13 representatives from a broad range of public and private organizations.

Dr. Capilouto expressed the team’s appreciation to Alabama Gov. Don Siegelman, state health leaders and others for their support as the state took several important first steps to address some of the most compelling issues as they relate to improving oral health care for children.

As a prelude to her discussion of the state Oral Health Strategic Plan, Dr. Capilouto presented the group’s vision statement: “To ensure every child in Alabama enjoys optimal health by providing equal and timely access to quality, comprehensive oral health care, where prevention is emphasized promoting the total well-being of the child.”

Roadblocks to achieving this vision, she explained, include too few dentists, a poorly informed and apathetic public and a lack of state policy to protect and promote oral health. Therefore, she explained that the group had performed a reality assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to success. (See chart next page) Identified strengths include state government support, increased Medicaid rates and increased outreach efforts while too few dental providers, lack of community education and reimbursement issues are weaknesses to be addressed.

She posed the following questions:
• Where do we want to be in the future?
• What does the preferred future for children with respect to oral health look like?
• What are the outcomes for children we hope to achieve?
• What will be the government’s role in achieving this vision?
• What role will others play?
• How will we know we are making progress?

In terms of opportunities, Dr. Capilouto noted the willingness of the Alabama Dental Association to become involved, new funding sources for
dental resident education and for multi-agency participation as positive trends. Threats to progress are seen in workforce shortages, apathy toward Dr. Capilouto holds the rank of professor and is dean of the University of Alabama School of Dentistry. She received her DMD from the University of Alabama School of Dentistry and a master's in epidemiology from the Harvard School of Public Health. Dr. Capilouto has 24 years of teaching experience at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and as a lecturer at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. For nine years, she served as program director of the Advanced Educational Program in General Dentistry at the UA dental school.

Page Finding the Solution 12

**Strengths**
- Support from State government
- Multi-agency work group
- New dental clinics
- Grant support
- Increased Medicaid rates
- Increased outreach efforts
- Links to data collection systems
- State water fluoridation-state and federal funding
- School-based programs
- Majority of dental graduates stay in Alabama

**Weaknesses**
- Reimbursement issues
- Lack of dental providers
- Lack of community education
- Decreased state funding for dental
- Insufficient database
- Limitation on dental auxiliaries
- Insufficient state personnel
- Lack of policy to protect and promote oral health
- Limited partnerships
- Reluctance of dental community to accept third-party reimbursement

oral health issues and the lack of knowledge regarding dental care in the general population. “A child is not well if he has poor oral health,” she emphasized, noting that most people are aware of the need for overall good health, but often do not understand the role of dental health in achieving optimal health.

In crafting the state’s oral health strategic plan, the policy team identified three priorities and developed action steps to accomplish each priority. These are:
1) To increase the number of dentists in the state providing care to the underserved and address poor distribution in rural areas;
2) To increase educational and outreach efforts in communities and collaborative efforts among public/private entities and governmental
agencies; and
3) To develop and implement a surveillance and monitoring process to accurately assess and track the oral health status of Alabama citizens. In terms of increasing the number of dentists available to Alabama children, some of the ideas in the plan call for exploring use of alternative providers to provide preventive and educational services to pregnant women and children under age 3, expansion of the Resident Placement program and efforts to increase capacity at the University of Alabama Dental School.
Dr. Capilouto commended the efforts of the Smile Alabama! Initiative for the progress made in terms of outreach and education, particularly in raising awareness about the need to obtain care. Other educational and outreach ideas contained in the plan include educational outreach to legislators and closer involvement with the state’s Children’s Policy Councils.
To help identify future needs, the state will need to conduct an assessment and identify areas of need while developing a database to monitor changes.
“To achieve our vision,” Dr. Capilouto said, “we must identify the reality of where we are now . . . to close the gap.”

**Opportunities**
- Multi-agency partnerships
- State government aware of crisis
- Federal loan repayment program now available for dental graduates
- GME funding of dental residents
- Assessment of entire state as a health professional shortage area
- Federal government promoting dental science and technology
- Alabama Dental Association willing to assist in dental initiatives

**Threats**
- State population increasing
- Worsening workforce shortages
- Inadequate state funding infrastructure
- Poor provider relationships with third-party payors
- Apathy regarding dental needs
- Failure to accept third party reimbursement
- General population lack of knowledge of the importance of dental care

Alabama Dental Summit Report Page
Elements of Success
James J. Crall, DDS, ScD

The similarity of voice and message coming to policy makers really does make a difference. When they don’t hear the message the same way, it gets confusing and when they are confused, rather than do something wrong, the tendency is to do nothing.

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In the long term, coalitions are extremely important in carrying the message to policy makers. They are an important element in making positive and sustained change.

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While oral health successes in the past were typically measured by the number of cavities that were filled, future successes will be contingent on the ability of states and organizations to develop targeted interventions that address oral health issues within the context of overall health, according to Dr. James J. Crall, director of the Maternal
and Child Health Bureau’s National Oral Health Policy Center at Columbia University.

To that end, the dental community, state leaders and interested organizations must seek to connect and cooperate, to be creative and to develop strong advocacy efforts to convince policy makers and others about the importance of oral health to overall health.

“The modern-day concept of disease management and awareness of environmental and cultural influences leads us to new levels and targets of oral health promotion,” said Dr. Crall. He noted that dental decay is now regarded as a dynamic disease process where interventions can be used to prevent or delay the presence of decay through development of individual prevention and/or disease management strategies.

Outreach concepts in the past that focused only on treatment and then later, prevention, are no longer appropriate in view of the dynamics of the current situation, he explained. For example, “one size fits all” prevention efforts now must be more targeted to address issues of those most at risk of dental disease.

“This is much more than about teeth. It is a lot about environment as well as what people are doing every day to augment their health,” he said. “We have got to be sure that the behaviors are there.”

“I think the real opportunity here comes from engaging a broad range of individuals so we get a better understanding of why these populations have the dental diseases they do. Then we can design more effective interventions that are tailored to community differences,” he said.

Dr. Crall stressed that state-based groups must work together to bring about legislative and policy initiatives that address oral health disparities.

Some of the more encouraging efforts now underway include the Smile Alabama! Initiative, the ABCD program in Washington state, a fluoride varnish demonstration project in North Carolina and the Delta Demonstration effort in Michigan known as the MI-CHILD program.

Several states also have taken the initiative to improve access by improving reimbursement.

**Dr. Crall’s Guiding Principles**

*This is about is getting everyone connected and working together.*
We must connect people who can make a difference.

• Try to get as close to the mainstream as you can. Most dentists are in solo or small practices and can’t be Medicaid specialists.
• Think in terms of prevention and treatment, not instead of. Both have to happen.
• Integration, not fragmentation
• Work on prevention in the long-term, but remember that there are kids with disease right now who have problems and that we need to get services to them.
• Recognize that some children are hard to treat and not everyone will be able to treat them.

rates, offering tax credits and loan forgiveness. Other states have established surveillance and demonstration programs to determine which programs and interventions are effective. Another idea suggested by Dr. Crall calls for creating a “dental home” for children before age 1, much like the medical homes created by many health insurance programs. This would be particularly important for those children at moderate-to-high risk for dental disease.
One of the most important things that states can do is to work with a broad base of individuals and groups to call attention to the oral health needs of children and the potential solutions. One way to do this, Dr. Crall said, is to work with community-based coalitions, such as the Children’s Policy Councils in each Alabama county.
“In the long term, coalitions are extremely important in carrying the message to policy makers,” he said. “They are an important element in making positive and sustained change.” Additionally, he observed that coalitions and groups aid in the change process through their ability to communicate a unified message to a wide audience.

“Sometimes it (change) takes years,” he said. “In places where that (progress) is happening, the similarity of voice and message coming to policy makers really does make a difference. When they don’t hear the message the same way, it gets confusing and when they are confused, rather than do something wrong, the tendency is to do nothing. That’s why our issue has been on the back burner. You have to narrow it down and find the things they agree on.”

Meanwhile, he emphasized that various groups involved in the issue need to try to work together to construct better policies to meet the oral health needs of all children by reducing the burden of oral diseases and increasing appropriate use of oral health services. And, there is a critical need to get funding levels where they need to be.

“Advocacy is a big piece of this. People have to be convinced that this is a broad issue.”

Alabama Dental Summit Report

Surveillance Systems
Kathy Phipps DrPH, MPH

Until we can measure baseline data to determine the impact of the programs we implement and show their effectiveness, we won’t have much impact on oral health.

States with an active oral health surveillance
program not only have good data for decision making, but also an effective advocacy tool to raise public awareness and build support for policy or funding initiatives to expand access to dental care, according to Dr. Kathy Phipps, a nationally recognized research consultant specializing in oral epidemiology. Through discussion of oral health surveillance activities in other states, Dr. Phipps demonstrated for the Dental Summit participants how Alabama policy makers and state health leaders can use oral health surveillance data for advocacy, decision making and tracking. Surveillance, she explained, means the ongoing collection, analysis and interpretation of health data essential to the planning, implementation and evaluation of public health practice. It also involves the timely dissemination of data to those who need to know. Surveillance programs can help public health officials monitor trends in oral disease, highlight at-risk populations, evaluate current programs, identify new program needs and justify program or actions in place. Dr. Phipps reminded the audience, however, that even the best data collection and analysis efforts are incomplete without dissemination of the data. “We must use data for advocacy purposes so that we can base our policy decisions on good information that is available to us,” she emphasized. On the national level, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control perform this function. While this information is helpful, it does not provide the level of detail needed to perform in-depth analysis at the state or local level. Another
national effort
is the National Oral
Health Surveillance
System (NOHSS), a collaborative project between
the CDC and the Association of State and Territorial
Dental Directors (ASTDD) that serves as a
clearinghouse for state level data on oral health.
Some of the factors tracked by the NOHSS
project include dental visits, teeth cleaned,
complete tooth loss and fluoridation access for
people of all ages. Additionally, caries (decay)
experience, untreated dental decay, sealant use
and incidence of oral cancer are collected on

Kathy Phipps, DrPH, MPH
As a consultant, Dr. Phipps has served for more than 13 years on a variety of national agencies
and boards. She has written extensively on issues including oral health for all age groups,
water fluoridation and bone density. She is a frequent presenter at seminars on dental health
and the impact of osteoporosis on teeth. Dr. Phipps is an adjunct professor of Public Health
Dentistry at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. She received a master’s of public
health and a doctorate from the Department of Community Health Programs, School of Public
Health at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

We must use data for
advocacy purposes so
that we can base our
policy decisions on good
information that is
available to us.

children.
National, standardized projects enable states to
use the findings from oral health surveys to make
state-to-state comparisons on socioeconomic
groups, the impact of dental health coverage,
race/ethnic issues, impact on individuals speaking
English as a second language and the incidence
of early childhood caries. This lays the
groundwork to direct money to programs based
on outcomes, she said.
The benefits of an oral health survey in Alabama
include documentation
of problem
areas, raising awareness of oral health issues and potential for increased funding if used appropriately. She also explained that such a survey would not be expensive to implement.

In other states, data that has been effectively collected, analyzed and reported have been helpful in bringing oral health to the forefront through the news media and through publication of reports, in identifying populations in need and by increasing political awareness regarding oral health matters. Essential components of a statewide oral health survey include a basic, standardized screening tool, statewide problem sampling, trained examiners and diagnosis criteria. Dr. Phipps also noted that better results are generally obtained from screening children who are at least in the third grade, although other age groups can be used.

She pointed to the experience of the State of Washington which conducted state surveys in 1993-94 and again in 2000. As a result of the first oral health survey, the state expanded its oral health program with the buy-in of the state legislature and the allocation of funds for a school sealant program. The project also stimulated public and private foundations to invest money in an oral health program. Washington’s 2000 survey built on earlier successes, using nursing employees already in the field and by fostering partnerships with groups such as tribal organizations to collect data. In addition, the project worked to involve more groups and to use a random sampling of all children, not just those at high risk. Other benefits of the Washington survey included encouragement to develop local
oral health coalitions and support and encouragement to the counties to develop data collection systems to collect data on a regular basis. Without good data, states will be limited in the progress they can make to improve oral health, Dr. Phipps observed. “In my opinion, assessment must be made a priority to improve oral health,” she said. “Until we can measure baseline data to determine the impact of the programs we implement and show their effectiveness, we won’t have much impact on oral health.”

Alabama Dental Summit Report Page

How to Have No Tooth Decay in 2008

David Noel, DDS, MPH

Is it possible to eliminate tooth decay?

“Repairing teeth while ignoring the underlying cause is the same as repairing a roof while the house is on fire.

David Noel, DDS, MPH

Chief Consultant to California’s Department of Health Services Medicaid Dental Program, Dr. Noel also has served as an American Dental Association spokesperson and consultant to the ADA Council on Dental Practice. He received his DDS degree from Loyola University School of Dentistry in Chicago and a master’s of public health at the University of Michigan. He is a faculty member of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Dentistry, holds a lifetime appointment with California Community Colleges, and is an adjunct professor at San Diego State University.

Dr. David Noel, chief dental program consultant for the California Department of Health Services, challenged Dental Summit participants to “let go of the past” and use current tools, methods and information to eliminate tooth decay in Alabama. New science has transformed the way that we look at tooth decay, according to Dr. Noel. Now, it is generally known that tooth decay is the long-term result of a transmitted bacterial infection, often between mothers and young children. Of the
500 or so different types of environmental bacteria found in the mouth, about seven are associated with tooth decay. Consequently, states must develop systems to deliver and pay for the identification, control or elimination of tooth decay infection in a person’s mouth, he said. This will require an active educational and awareness effort for providers and the general public and support from policy makers. Such efforts must of necessity be targeted to at-risk groups, Dr. Noel said, noting that low income and low educational levels are the most reliable indicators of people who are at the highest risk for tooth decay infection.

“We must inform these people that cavities occur long after tooth decay germs have invaded the mouth, that this infection can be prevented, controlled and/or eliminated and that there are tests that will show who is at risk,” he said.

Dr. Noel advocates preventive care for mothers and infants, including saliva tests for pregnant mothers, training in proper oral hygiene techniques, diet counseling, fluoride applications and referrals to dentists for existing decay problems.

“Oral health programs are needed in day care centers, pre-schools, Head Start programs, schools, churches and in community groups,” he said. The present tendency, he observed, is for tooth decay to be repaired without addressing the environmental problems, which may have caused the problem. In California, this is seen in children who have repeated fillings to the same tooth.

He cited the work of nationally-recognized dental researcher Dr. John D.B. Featherstone, which established that filling cavities does not eliminate the bacteria that caused the decay, leading to dental disease progression. This is why new approaches must look at the root causes of the problem, Dr. Noel said.

“Repairing teeth while ignoring the underlying cause is the same as repairing a roof while the house is on fire.” Dr. Noel emphasized. “Infection plus ignorance plus neglect equals tooth decay.”
Diane Covington Brunson, RDH, MPH
Thomas Vocino, PhD

Workgroup Facilitators

Diane Covington Brunson is the director for the Oral Health Program at Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment where her responsibilities include developing annual goals/objectives, establishing policies, procedures and activities for the Oral Health program, as well as overall management of budget resources. She also is a clinical assistant professor, Applied Dentistry/Dental Hygiene of the University of Colorado and is course director of Community Health Programs and Issues for senior dental hygiene students. A past fellow of the Regional Institute for Health and Environmental Leadership, Ms. Brunson currently maintains advisory councils, and serves as liaison with related coalitions, task forces, committees and groups concerned with oral health. She received a bachelor’s in dental hygiene from the University of Colorado and a master’s of public health from the University of Northern Colorado. Her professional affiliations include serving as current president of the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, and memberships in the American Dental Association, American Association of Public Health Dentistry and numerous other professional organizations.

A prolific author, Ms. Brunson has written extensively on issues addressing prevention, access to care and other critical matters relating to dental care for children of all ages.

Dr. Thomas Vocino, distinguished research professor and head of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Auburn University at Montgomery, is widely recognized for his expertise in public policy and public administration. He has served as a faculty member at AUM since 1974 and received the AUM Alumni Association’s Faculty Service
Award for 1999.
Dr. Vocino is co-author and co-editor of five books, including Contemporary Public Administration, which has been used in over 100 universities, and currently serves as co-editor of the Public Administration Quarterly. He is also the author or co-author of over 50 articles, book chapters and technical reports and has been published in leading journals in his field including the Administrative Science Quarterly, the Public Administration Review and the American Review of Public Administration.
Dr. Vocino received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee and his doctorate from Southern Illinois University. He has served terms on the governing boards of the American Society for Public Administration, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, and the Southern Political Association. During 1996-97 he served as President of the Policy Studies Organization. In 1991, he was the recipient of the Don Stone Service to ASPA Award of the American Society for Public Administration.

**Dental Summit Recommendations**

Alabama Dental Summit participants met in small workgroups where they were tasked with the responsibility of identifying system, provider and patient education strategies that would ultimately result in increased access to dental care for all Alabama children. Facilitated by experts in oral health care, policy and system development, epidemiology and government policy, the workgroups met twice during the two-day meeting to focus on four key issues:

Workgroup experts included Kathy Phipps, DrPH; Diane Brunson, RDH, MPH; James J. Crall, DDS, ScD; and Thomas Vocino, PhD. As a result of the two sessions, each workgroup developed a set of recommendations to be submitted to the Alabama Oral Health Policy Team for possible inclusion in the state’s Oral Health Policy.
Health Strategic Plan (See Appendix Page 36)

- Building Public Awareness
- Obtaining Legislative and Regulatory Changes
- Surveillance/Monitoring System Development
- Identification of Funding Resources

Obtaining Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Workgroup

**Recommendation 1:**
Define how oral health team communicates with legislature

Responsible Parties
Public Health, State Dental Director, Medicaid, Head Start

**Action Step(s)**

- Talk with individuals involved with children’s affairs at the Cabinet level
- Understand how policy councils function and how they can be used for oral health issues
- Create a legislative advisory council

**Timeframe for Implementation / (Due Dates)**
These measures should be implemented as soon as possible

**Recommendation 2:**
Provide incentives to increase the dental workforce to underserved areas. These could be in the form of loan repayments, tax credits for serving Medicaid patients, and community matching programs (state or federal funds)

Responsible Parties
Public Health, State Dental Director, primary care offices, schools, dental associations

**Timeframe for Implementation / (Due Dates)**
Recommendations to the legislature by June 2003 with implementation by January 2004

**Recommendation 3:**
Remove barriers to oral health workforce expansion by exploring licensing options and practice acts (e.g. increase licensing options to increase the number of providers in underserved areas, such as out-of-state dentists who volunteer in underserved areas)

Responsible Parties
ALDA, ADA, Public Health, Board of Nursing, Board of Dental Examiners, Schools

**Action Step(s)**
• Carry proposals to the Board of Dental Examiners
• Modify practice acts to expand duties to auxiliary personnel and redefine those identified to perform dental health services
• Explore the Nurse Practice Act to identify how nurses can assist

**Recommendation 4:**
Increase funding to UAB School of Dentistry to increase capacity to serve underserved populations

**Responsible Parties**
Public Health, Schools, UAB, Head Start

**Action Step(s)**
• Initiate a qualified workforce study
• Develop a packet (fact sheet with focused message) to deliver to legislature
• Rally support of UAB administrators to forward recommendations to the legislature

**Timeframe for Implementation / (Due Dates)**
Complete study by October 2002 and deliver information to legislature by December 2002

**Alabama Dental Summit Report Page**

**Identification of Funding Resources Workgroup**

**Recommendation 1:**
Investigate partnering with churches or other public or private entities to provide dental care in alternate settings

A. Investigate partnering with churches or other public or private entities to provide alternate dental treatment facilities. (Other possible entities to work with might be UAB or county health departments)

B. Partner with public/private entities to create volunteer networks of dentists using donated space from facilities as alternate dental treatment facilities

**Responsible Parties**
Local Children’s Policy Councils

**Action Step(s)**
• Research applicable laws; tort liability (Good Samaritan laws)
• Identify needed supplies (both equipment and treatment)
• Locate suitable facilities (e.g. church, health department) outside providers’ own facilities

**Recommendation 2:**
Use alternate methods of contacting and educating parents (and children) on dental preventative care. This might include requiring dental education for Medicaid-funded prenatal visits, using the WIC program as a contact opportunity, day care, school-based services screenings

Action Step(s)
- Look for a grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Create educational materials and disseminate to family practice/pediatricians for “age appropriate education” for EPSDT screening

Recommendation 3:
Pursue funding for production and distribution of educational materials

Action Step(s)
- Explore grants available through CDC, NIDCR, private foundations, corporations
- Expand distribution channels (WIC, pediatricians, augment training, provide toothbrushes to providers to give to parents of 9-12 month olds)

Recommendation 4:
Establish a mechanism to identify available sources of funding (and maximize them) for oral health services (e.g. identify services and/or funding eligible for federal match, etc.)

Recommendation 5:
Explore the feasibility of developing a program similar to the Washington State Access to Babies and Children Dentistry (ABCD) Program

Action Step(s)
- Check with Washington State for their curriculum
- Determine if Alabama dentists are interested (survey to determine level of interest)
- Availability of continuing education

Recommendation 6:
Survey other Medicaid and Public Health agencies to identify innovative, unusual means to fund dental access, e.g. Auburn-Opelika area school systems, BC/BS Program in Bibb County

Page Finding the Solution
Building Public Awareness Workgroup

**Recommendation 1:**
Educate policymakers who make decisions regarding oral health

**Action Step(s)**
- Compile fact sheets with statistics for legislators

**Recommendation 2:**
Continue educational programs, such as those in conjunction with Medicaid’s Patient 1st, *Smile Alabama*! Initiative

**Action Step(s)**
- Continue/expand on materials and continuing education programs for pediatricians, medical organizations, primary care MDs, dentists, dental organizations, RNs, children’s hospitals (consistency is key)

**Recommendation 3:**
Educate the public on sealants and optimal fluoride usage

**Recommendation 4:**
Approach diverse groups to disseminate information in different ways to make an impact regarding oral care and education

**Recommendation 5:**
Establish a public awareness work group to develop a broad based, consistent oral health message/communication tool for 0-5 population

**Responsible Parties**
Alabama Oral Health Policy Team

**Action Step(s)**
- AL Oral Health Policy Team to pull participants together
- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, including identification of all available resources as well as developing an evaluation component
- Identify partnerships in spreading the message (WIC, Head Start)
- Develop continuing education components, not only for dental services for others as well
- Seek support from the business community (funding and marketing expertise)
- Develop training tools for Head Start and day care educators

**Surveillance and Monitoring Workgroup**
**Recommendation 1:**
Collect oral health data as early as possible in each child's life (e.g., 6 months – 5 years by county.

**Recommendation 2:**
Implement a statewide oral health survey of 3rd graders.

1,335,954 children in the state
386,223 children eligible for Medicaid
1,560 licensed general dentists
71 licensed pediatric dentists
565 Medicaid dental providers

**Alabama Dental Statistics**
Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health. (Data from Board of Dental Examiners reflects licensed dentists in year 2000.)
Alabama Medicaid Agency, EDS enrolled provider records, November 20, 2001. (Number reflects part-time providers, out-of-state providers, inactive Medicaid dental providers and providers who serve more than one county.)

Page Finding the Solution

39,232 children in the county
7,843 children eligible for Medicaid
55 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
9 Medicaid dental providers

Baldwin County
27,314 children in the county
3,118 children eligible for Medicaid
12 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

Autauga County
6,124 children in the county
1,902 children eligible for Medicaid
6 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
4 Medicaid dental providers

Bibb County
Barbour County
3,558 children in the county
2,055 children eligible for Medicaid
2 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

Bullock County
14,826 children in the county
3,504 children eligible for Medicaid
7 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
6 Medicaid dental providers

Blount County
8,554 children in the county
2,509 children eligible for Medicaid
9 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

Alabama Dental Summit Report Page
31,713 children in the county
10,812 children eligible for Medicaid
37 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
17 Medicaid dental providers

**Calhoun County**
6,677 children in the county
3,113 children eligible for Medicaid
5 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

**Butler County**
10,469 children in the county
3,371 children eligible for Medicaid
8 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

**Chambers County**
6,141 children in the county
2,094 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

**Cherokee County**
4,722 children in the county
1,838 children eligible for Medicaid
5 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
4 Medicaid dental providers

**Chilton County**
15,122 children in the county
4,838 children eligible for Medicaid
17 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
10 Medicaid dental providers

**Choctaw County**
4,194 children in the county
2,157 children eligible for Medicaid
2 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

**Conecuh County**
25
Colbert County
12,462 children in the county
3,961 children eligible for Medicaid
16 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

Coffee County
3,918 children in the county
1,352 children eligible for Medicaid
2 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

Clay County
8,960 children in the county
3,799 children eligible for Medicaid
9 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

Clarke County
3,973 children in the county
1,306 children eligible for Medicaid
0 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
1 Medicaid dental providers

Cleburne County
26
Alabama Dental Summit Report Page
10,335 children in the county
3,982 children eligible for Medicaid
11 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
6 Medicaid dental providers

Covington County
3,386 children in the county
1,047 children eligible for Medicaid
1 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
1 Medicaid dental providers

Coosa County
21,925 children in the county
6,001 children eligible for Medicaid
19 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
8 Medicaid dental providers

Cullman County
3,862 children in the county
1,565 children eligible for Medicaid
3 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

**Crenshaw County**
15,187 children in the county
4,704 children eligible for Medicaid
11 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

**Dale County**
15,426 children in the county
8,710 children eligible for Medicaid
11 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

**Dallas County**
19,424 children in the county
4,488 children eligible for Medicaid
9 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
4 Medicaid dental providers

**Elmore County**
10,922 children in the county
4,086 children eligible for Medicaid
11 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
10 Medicaid dental providers

**Escambia County**
5,139 children in the county
1,632 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

**Fayette County**
28,742 children in the county
8,537 children eligible for Medicaid
36 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
13 Medicaid dental providers

**Etowah County**

**Franklin County**
18,556 children in the county
5,908 children eligible for Medicaid
16 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

**DeKalb County**
8,906 children in the county
3,198 children eligible for Medicaid
8 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

5,865 children in the county
2,642 children eligible for Medicaid
1 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

**Hale County**
3,367 children in the county
1,648 children eligible for Medicaid
6 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

**Greene County**

**Geneva County**
15,041 children in the county
4,094 children eligible for Medicaid
14 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
10 Medicaid dental providers

**Jackson County**
26,236 children in the county
9,032 children eligible for Medicaid
35 licensed general dentists
4 licensed pediatric dentists
18 Medicaid dental providers

**Houston County**
4,587 children in the county
1,683 children eligible for Medicaid
5 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
4 Medicaid dental providers

**Henry County**
7,095 children in the county
2,630 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
1 Medicaid dental providers

4,400 children in the county
1,401 children eligible for Medicaid
3 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

**Lamar County**
191,320 children in the county
50,492 children eligible for Medicaid
380 licensed general dentists
33 licensed pediatric dentists
86 Medicaid dental providers

**Jefferson County**

**Lawrence County**

**Lauderdale County**
10,269 children in the county
2,369 children eligible for Medicaid
39 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
1 Medicaid dental providers
18,742 children in the county
3,932 children eligible for Medicaid
14 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

**Limestone County**
39,037 children in the county
7,535 children eligible for Medicaid
26 licensed general dentists
3 licensed pediatric dentists
17 Medicaid dental providers

**Lee County**
30
24,357 children in the county
5,932 children eligible for Medicaid
39 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
9 Medicaid dental providers

**Macon County**
82,973 children in the county
14,943 children eligible for Medicaid
121 licensed general dentists
9 licensed pediatric dentists
45 Medicaid dental providers
Madison County
4,693 children in the county
2,414 children eligible for Medicaid
1 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

Lowndes County
7,297 children in the county
3,115 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

Marengo County

Marshall County
8,230 children in the county
2,417 children eligible for Medicaid
8 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

Marion County
23,594 children in the county
7,599 children eligible for Medicaid
29 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

Monroe County
127,655 children in the county
40,117 children eligible for Medicaid
164 licensed general dentists
6 licensed pediatric dentists
46 Medicaid dental providers

Mobile County
32,269 children in the county
7,218 children eligible for Medicaid
36 licensed general dentists
2 licensed pediatric dentists
15 Medicaid dental providers

Morgan County
69,654 children in the county
24,685 children eligible for Medicaid
89 licensed general dentists
4 licensed pediatric dentists
31 Medicaid dental providers

Montgomery County
Pickens County
4,236 children in the county
2,510 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
4 Medicaid dental providers

Perry County
6,605 children in the county
2,672 children eligible for Medicaid
2 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

Sumter County
18,649 children in the county
4,706 children eligible for Medicaid
13 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
17 Medicaid dental providers

St. Clair County
42,708 children in the county
3,597 children eligible for Medicaid
27 licensed general dentists
1 licensed pediatric dentists
6 Medicaid dental providers

Shelby County
6,567 children in the county
2,358 children eligible for Medicaid
5 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

Randolph County
15,168 children in the county
5,519 children eligible for Medicaid
5 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
2 Medicaid dental providers

Russell County
9,477 children in the county
4,021 children eligible for Medicaid
8 licensed general dentists
2 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

**Pike County**
5,118 children in the county
2,896 children eligible for Medicaid
4 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

**Talladega County**
51,424 children in the county
13,686 children eligible for Medicaid
59 licensed general dentists
2 licensed pediatric dentists
31 Medicaid dental providers

**Tuscaloosa County**
11,516 children in the county
39,516 children eligible for Medicaid
13 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
5 Medicaid dental providers

**Tallapoosa County**
4,661 children in the county
2,989 children eligible for Medicaid
3 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

**Wilcox County**
5,956 children in the county
1,993 children eligible for Medicaid
3 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
3 Medicaid dental providers

**Washington County**
19,387 children in the county
6,800 children eligible for Medicaid
21 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
7 Medicaid dental providers

**Walker County**

**Winston County**
6,793 children in the county
2,183 children eligible for Medicaid
3 licensed general dentists
0 licensed pediatric dentists
0 Medicaid dental providers

Alabama Dental Summit Report Page

• Dental Task Force established January 1998
• Rates increased for targeted dental codes January 1999
• Legislative proclamation issued April 2000
• Governor’s letter of support issued to state dentists October 2000
• Dentists surveyed in coordination with Alabama Dental Association 1999 and 2000
• Interdisciplinary Workgroup established to evaluate state March 2000 needs and develop strategic plan for Medicaid dental program
• Simplified enrollment material with user friendly billing manual Fall 1999 developed for dentists
• Claims payment process streamlined with free software, October 1999 ADA-approved claim forms and scanning technology
• Provider outreach program initiated Summer 1999 Fiscal agent visits all dental providers Spring 2000 Participation in state and regional meetings Annual presentations to dental students
• Grant applications Robert Wood Johnson Foundation November 2000 National Governors’ Association October 2000
• Targeted Case Management program for dental initiated March 2000
• Global Dental Rate Fees increased October 2000
• Smile Alabama! Initiative launched October 2000
• Robert Wood Johnson grant awarded February 2001
• Easy-to-read patient education materials developed including May 2001 posters, brochures, reminder cards and rights and responsibilities
• Dental Workshops statewide draw 750 dental providers and staff June 2001
• Workgroup renamed Oral Health Coalition of Alabama to reflect July 2001 broader mission of improving oral health in state
• Patient education video created for October 2001
Medicaid providers and outreach locations

- New Medicaid dental providers yield 33% increase September 2001
- Number of counties with 1 or no Medicaid dental November 2001 providers reduced from 19 to 11

**Measuring Our Progress**

**Alabama Oral Health Strategic Plan**

**PRIORITY ONE**

Increase the availability and accessibility of dental care to children by expanding the scope and supply of the oral health work force in the state of Alabama and address the lack of distribution in rural areas.

1.1.1. **Assess feasibility of utilizing GuardCare for dental services**

**Action Steps - Completed**

1. Dr. Thornton to contact Lt. Pal Given about utilization of GuardCare to address areas of state with need for immediate access to oral health care
2. Meet with Governor to establish need to mobilize dental unit for GuardCare
3. Meet with Guard, ADPH, Medicaid, and community dentists to establish partners, dates and referral sites
4. GuardCare scheduled for April 30-May 4, 2001. Met goal to screen at least 500 adults and children, referring those requiring care

**Action Steps - Current**

Explore expansion of this initiative to other areas of the state

1.1.2. **Explore expansion of Resident Placement Program and other alternative care settings through partnership with churches or other public or private entities to provide dental care**

**Action Steps - Completed**

1. Meet and discuss with UAB Dental School (Dr. Capilouto and Dr. Thornton) feasibility of utilizing residents in health department clinic sites and community health care centers
2. Review Medicaid policy on reimbursement of residents

**Action Steps - Current**

1. Determine if additional payment sources exist for set-up of clinics - Meet with Children's Commissioner, Pam Baker
2. Meet with Alabama Primary Health Care Association and ADPH to determine if existing space can be utilized, determine potential sites
3. Look for funding, grants, volunteer dentists, etc. for start-up new dental clinics in counties with limited to no dental care access
4. Investigate partnering with churches or other public or private entities to provide alternate dental treatment facilities as well as partnering with public/private entities to create volunteer networks of dentists using donated space from facilities as alternate dental treatment facilities

Strategies
A. Research applicable laws; tort liability (Good Samaritan laws)
B. Identify needed supplies (both equipment and treatment)
C. Locate suitable facilities (e.g. church, health department), providers’ own facilities

1.1.3. Develop program that increases utilization of auxiliary assistance with a linkage back to dentists to ensure continuity of care

Action Steps - Completed
1. Investigate feasibility of amending practice statute to allow hygienists to practice in limited settings under general supervision

Action Steps - Current
1. Draft suggested language for changes/amendments to Dental Practice Act
2. Develop screening/referral program utilizing auxiliaries with linkage back to community dentists - June 2003

1.1.4. Explore the use of alternative providers (OB/Gyn’s, FP’s and Pediatricians) to provide preventative and educational services to pregnant women and children under the age of 3

Action Steps - Completed
1. Review Physician and Dental Practice Acts to determine need for amendments
2. Develop educational materials for use by providers identified above

Action Steps - Current
1. Pursue development of program utilizing alternative providers for patient education and oral health screening services, evaluate funding for implementation-December 2002
2. Working with dental school to increase capacity

1.1.5 Work with Dental School, Legislature and communities to increase dental workforce with emphasis on under-served areas in the state

Action Steps - Current
1. Identify costs to add positions to dental school. (How much does a single additional slot cost?)
2. Work to increase funding to the UAB School of Dentistry to increase capacity to serve under-served populations of Alabama

Strategies
A. Initiate a qualified workforce study
B. Distribute a packet (including legislative fact sheet) with a focused message (See 1.2.5)
C. Rally support of UAB administrators to forward recommendations to the legislature
3. Pursue investments – State/Private funding
4. Pursue establishment of scholarship/loan repayment program, tax credits for serving
Medicaid patients, and community matching programs (state or federal) Recommendations to Legislature by 2003.

**Responsible parties-ADPH, state dental director, primary care offices, schools, dental associations**

5. Diversity enhancement – Start middle school level career path. Offer dependent on meeting requirements, return to community for guidance.

Career fairs *(Market dentistry)*

6. Contact Office of Rural Health Utilization to see what assistance is available

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**PRIORITY TWO**

Increase educational efforts in communities regarding the importance of oral health.

2.1.1. Statewide *Smile Alabama!* Public awareness campaign emphasizing prevention and the need to obtain care

**Action Steps - Completed**

1. Develop materials and obtain approval from Governor, Dental Task Force and Medicaid Commissioner
2. Obtain contracts for development of videos/PSA’s
3. Obtain contract(s) for radio/television oral health awareness campaign
4. Start running of PSA’s by December 2001

**Action Steps - Current**

1. Refinement of the message for consistency and wider distribution
2. Pursue additional funding for production and distribution of educational materials

**Strategies**

A. Explore grants available through CDC, NIDCR, private foundations, corporations
B. Expand distribution channels (WIC, pediatricians, augment training, provide toothbrushes to give to parents of 9-12 month olds)

2.1.2. Provision of information on oral health in non-traditional dental settings through case managers

**Action Steps - Current**

1. Review information for inclusion in prenatal packets on oral health-In progress, due by May 2002. *Responsible Parties-Medicaid & ADPH*
3. Determine key message(s) and communication strategies by April 2002. *Responsible Parties-Medicaid & ADPH*
4. Provide training to case managers in order to integrate dental education into prenatal and post-partum care coordination visits by June 2002. *Responsible Parties-Medicaid & ADPH*

**Strategies**

A. Pursue additional grant funding
B. Disseminate materials developed to family practitioners/pediatricians for "age appropriate education" for anticipatory guidance requirements under EPSDT

2.1.3. Coordination with Policy Councils (67 County Level Councils)

**Action Steps - Completed**

1. Meet with Children’s Affairs Office and Commissioner Pam Baker

**Action Steps - Current**

1. Distribute materials developed, providing packets and originals for copying at the
2.1.4. Use partners (Coalition) for op-ed opportunities and to assist in implementation of strategic plan strategies

**Action Steps - Completed**
1. Schedule meeting of Oral Health Coalition of Alabama (OHCA) to request assistance in distribution of materials and to obtain input on additional steps to accomplish identified goals - Meeting held July 10, 2001

**Action Steps - Current**
1. Redefine function of dental workgroup to act as advisory group to state oral health team
2. Establish quarterly schedule of meetings for the Oral Health Coalition of Alabama with the formation of subgroups or committees for finalization and implementation of recommended action steps and development of strategies - by February 2002.

**Responsible Party - Medicaid & OHCA**
3. Identify diverse groups for the expansion of materials and educational programs on oral health
4. Seek and identify supporters from the business community for marketing expertise and possible funding assistance

2.1.5. Develop Oral Health Fact sheet for Legislators and other policy makers

**Action Steps - Current**
1. Work with Alabama Oral Health Policy Team to develop fact sheets for distribution to key policy makers at the start of the legislative session - February 2002 and Yearly.

**Responsible Parties - Medicaid, ADPH**

**Strategies**
A. Compile fact sheets with statistics for legislators
B. Talk with individuals involved with Children’s Affairs and the Governor’s office
C. Understand how the Policy Councils function and how they can be utilized to further an understanding of oral health issues

**Responsible Party - Oral Health Coalition of Alabama, subgroup on Education & Awareness**
3. Obtain approval from Governor’s office prior to distribution
4. Identify specific counties to target and get information on specific counties into the hands of appropriate legislators in the form of a letter from the coalition - County identified

2.1.6. Conduct State Dental Summit to obtain buy-in of additional stakeholders and assistance in implementation of plan

**Action Steps - Completed**
1. Submit proposal for funding to CMS Regional office/HRSA
2. Seek assistance from NGA in finalizing agenda with requests for assistance with speakers

**Action Steps - Current**
1. Determine need for follow-up Summit in one year.
PRIORITY THREE
Develop and implement surveillance/monitoring process to accurately assess oral health status in the State of Alabama

3.1.1. Conduct needs assessment of resources and identify areas of need

Action Steps - Completed
1. Develop questions to be used by Policy Councils in assessing oral needs in each county
2. Determine counties within the state with no or only one participating Medicaid provider

Action Steps - Current
1. Provide feedback to coalition members on findings
2. Obtain status report form Policy Councils on finding of county needs assessments done through Councils
3. Collect oral health data as early as possible in each child’s life (e.g. 6 months-5 years by county)
Responsible Party-ADPH

3.1.2. Develop database

Action Steps - Current
1. Develop survey for statewide assessment on oral health status-In progress
2. Conduct statewide survey to obtain baseline data -- Planned for 2002,
Responsible Party-ADPH
3. Establish benchmarks and develop ongoing monitoring process.

Revised February 17, 2002
Alabama Dental Summit Report Page 41

Alabama Oral Health Policy Team

Mary G. McIntyre, MD, MPH
Policy Team Chair
Associate Medical Director
Alabama Medicaid Agency
Montgomery, Alabama

Clyde Barganier, DrPH
Director
Office of Primary Care and Rural Health
Alabama Department of Public Health
Montgomery, Alabama

Lance Brown
Deputy Director of Public Policy
Office of Governor of Alabama
Montgomery, Alabama

Mary Lynne Capilouto, DMD, SM
Dean
University of Alabama School of Dentistry
Birmingham, Alabama

Roosevelt Daniel, DDS
Private Dentist
Medicaid Dental Task Force Member
Montgomery, Alabama

**Al Fox**
Executive Director
Alabama Primary Health Care Association
Montgomery, Alabama

**Sherry W. Goode, RDH**
Assistant Director
Oral Health Branch
Alabama Department of Public Health
Montgomery, Alabama

**Rep. Ronald “Ron” Johnson**
Member, Health Committee,
Alabama House of Representatives
Sylacauga, Alabama

**Stuart Lockwood, DMD, MPH**
State Dental Director
Oral Health Branch
Alabama Department of Public Health
Montgomery, Alabama

**Gayle Sandlin, MSW, LCSW**
Director
All Kids, Alabama’s S-CHIP program.
Alabama Department of Public Health
Montgomery, Alabama

**John Searcy, MD**
Medical Director
Alabama Medicaid Agency
Montgomery, Alabama

**John Thornton, DMD, MA**
Alabama Dental Association
Chairman, Department of Pediatric Dentistry
and Director, Postgraduate Program
in Pediatric Dentistry,
University of Alabama School of Dentistry.
Birmingham, Alabama

**Jim Wrye**
Deputy Commissioner
Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs
Montgomery, Alabama

---

**Oral Health Coalition of Alabama**

**Jackie Moffitt**
Alabama Department of Human Resources

**Dr. Joel Powell**
Dr. Butch Carroll
Alabama Pediatric Dental Association

Dr. Roosevelt Daniel
Dental Task Force

Rev. Joseph W. Davis
Health Ministries Association

Tina Edwards, RN
Alabama Medicaid Agency

Mary Finch
Alabama Medicaid Agency

Al Fox
Alabama Primary Health Care Association

Gage Franklin
Alabama Power/Southern Co.

Sherry Goode
Alabama Department of Public Health

Dr. Johnny Griffin
Alabama Dental Society

Julia Hayes
Alabama Department of Public Health

Angela Harris
Head Start

Sophia Harris
Focal

Rep. Ron Johnson
House of Representatives

Roberta Kelley
CMS Regional Office

Steve Lafreniere
Alabama Department of Mental Health

Sharis Lemay, R.N.
Alabama School Nurse Association

Dr. Stuart Lockwood
Alabama Department of Public Health

Dr. Mary McIntyre
Alabama Medicaid Agency

Holley Midgely
Alabama Academy of Family Physicians
Indigent Care Dental Clinics
May 2001

MOBILE
Baldwin
Escambia
Washington
Clarke
Choctaw
Monroe
Coconut
Wilcox
Marengo
Sumter
Dallas
Butler
Covington
Coffee
Dale
Henry
Barbour
Pike
Houston Geneva
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Chambers
Bulllock
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Marshall
Cherokee
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St. Clair
Calhoun
Cleburne
Randolph Clay
Talladega
Macon
Cullman

Health Department Clinic
FQHC Clinic
Other

Dental Shortages By County
May 2001

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### Designation Types

**Health Professional Shortage Areas**  
Prepared by: Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.  
Source: Bureau of Health Care Delivery Assistance Network, Health Professional Shortage Area Listing.  
Numbers represent additional dentists needed to eliminate the shortage designation.  
Call 1(800) 255-1992 for additional shortage area information.

#### No Designation

**Whole County Population**  
**Low-income Population**

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**Dental Shortages By County**  
*August 3, 2001*

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**Low Income Populations**
Health Professional Shortage Areas

Prepared by: Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.
Source: Bureau of Health Care Delivery Assistance Network, Health Professional Shortage Area Listing.
Numbers represent additional dentists needed to eliminate the shortage designation. Multi-county designations are indicated by the numbers enclosed in white frames astride county lines.
Call 1 (800) 255-1992 for additional shortage area information.

Single County Designations

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Page Finding the Solution

**General Dentists By County**

**May 2001**

The number in the county represents the number of licensed general dentists in the county.

State Total 1,478

121
36
26
59
27
380
35
8
89
11
164
37

MOBILE
BALDWYN
ESCAMBIA
WASHINGTON
CLARKE
CHOTAW
MONROE
CONCEW
WILCOX
MARENGO
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BUTLER
COVENTGTON
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CHILTON
BIBB
PERRY
HALE
GREENE
PICKENS
TUSCALOOSA
JEFFERSON
SHELBY
LAMAR
MARGRENT
FAYETTIE
WALKER
Pediatric Dentists By County
November 2000

PEDIATRIC DENTAL SERVICES BY COUNTY

The number above the county name represents the number of licensed pediatric dentists in the county.

Private Practice/PHC 66
Dental School Professors 4
Retirees 3
Total 73

Pediatric Dental Services
No Pediatric Services

1

MOBILE
BALDWIN
ESCAMBIA
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CONECUH
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CALHOUN
CLEBURNE
RANDOLPH
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Prepared by: Alabama Department of Public Health, Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.
Special Thanks to
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for sponsoring lunch and breaks
and the
Alabama Dental Society
for sponsoring the networking reception

Published by:
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PO Box 5624
Montgomery, AL 36103-5624
Dr. Mary G. McIntyre
Associate Medical Director
Robin Rawls
Associate Director
Research and Development
Mary Hasselwander
Public Information Specialist II
Research and Development

NGA Center for
BEST PRACTICES

ALABAMA DENTAL SUMMIT
2001

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Association of State
and Territorial Dental Directors