



Dental Public Health Project Descriptive Report Form

Please provide a description of your organization’s successful dental public health project by completing this form. Add extra lines to the form as needed but stay within **word limits**.

Please return the completed form to Lori Cofano: lcofano@astdd.org

Name of Project						
Maine Veterans’ Dental Network (MVDN)						
Executive Summary (250-word limit)						
<p>The Maine Bureau of Veterans’ Services (MBVS) received a large number of requests for access to dental care per week. Knowing that fewer than 15 percent of veterans receiving health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are eligible to receive comprehensive dental care, the Bureau conducted a six-month needs assessment in 2020, which looked at barriers to care and health inequities including – no connection to the VA, cost, transportation, rural location, residence in a nursing care facility, and lack of dentists. As a result, a 105-page report, <i>Oral Health Access for Maine’s Veterans</i>, was produced, which lead to a \$35,000 grant from Northeast Delta Dental to start a pilot program and the formation of the Maine Veterans’ Dental Network (MVDN), which is in its third year of operation.</p> <p>Currently, 22 Federally Qualified Health Centers, non-profit dental clinics, Maine’s two dental teaching schools, and a mobile dental clinic are participating. This grant funded program is sponsored through Northeast Delta Dental and in 2023, gained the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation as a second sponsor. Services are provided to veterans in need on a first come, first served basis, and are available until the grant funding runs out. This program establishes veterans with direct connection to a dental clinic. If their oral healthcare needs exceed the grant (\$500/veteran), the veteran is financially responsible for the remainder of the bill and can chose to continue with treatment or wait for the following year’s grant cycle.</p>						
Name of Program or Organization Submitting Project						
Maine Bureau of Veterans’ Services						
<i>Essential Public Health Services to Promote Health and Oral Health in the United States</i>						
Place an “X” in the box next to the Core Public Health Function(s) that apply to the project.						
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; width: 50px;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Assessment</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Policy development</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Assurance</td> </tr> </table>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assessment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assurance
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assessment					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy development					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assurance					

<http://www.astdd.org/state-guidelines/>

Project submissions will be categorized by the Core Public Health Functions on the ASTDD website.

Healthy People 2030 Objectives

List Healthy People 2030 objectives related to the project.

- Increase use of the oral health care system – OH-08.
- Reduce the proportion of people who can't get the dental care they need when they need it – AHS-05.
- Increase the proportion of adults who get recommended evidence-based preventive health care – AHS-08.
- Reduce the proportion of adults aged 20 to 74 with active or untreated tooth decay – OH-03.
- Reduce the proportion of older adults (aged 75 and older) with untreated root surface decay – OH-04.
- Reduce the proportion of adults aged 45 years and older who have lost all their teeth – OH-05.
- Reduce the proportion of adults aged 45 years and older with moderate and severe periodontitis – OH-06.
- Increase the proportion of oral and pharyngeal cancers detected at the earliest stage – OH-07.

This information will be used as a data resource for ASTDD purposes.

Keywords for sorting the project by topic.

Provide **three to five** keywords (e.g., access to care, children, coalitions, dental sealants, fluoride, policy, Medicaid, older adults, pregnant women, etc.) that describe the project. Keywords are used to categorize submissions.

Access to Care: Adults and Older Adults Services; Access to Care Communities; Prevention: Adults and Older Adults Oral Health; Prevention: Oral Cancer; Veterans; Rural Dental Care; Mobile Dental Clinics; Maine Dental Care Grants.

Detailed Project Description

Project Overview

(750-word limit)

1. What problem does the project address? How was the problem identified?

An estimated 15% of veterans receive their dental care from the VA, that leaves the other 85% to fend for themselves. Some have work benefits or a spouse who can provide dental insurance, others can afford to pay for care out of pocket, but that leaves a large group of veterans, many who are on fixed incomes and have not received dental care since they were discharged from the military, without a means to access or afford dental care. For older veterans, access to oral healthcare while residing in a nursing care facility is an ongoing issue. The veterans participating in our program range in age from mid-20's to 90-year-olds. We identified the existence of a problem in four ways:

1.) By the large number of calls, emails, and in person requests the Maine Bureau of

Veterans' Services received from veterans and their families on a weekly basis regarding access to dental care. The MVDN averages 20 calls and emails/week requesting connection to the program.

- 2.) The 2020, six-month needs assessment conducted by the Bureau regarding veterans' access to dental care in Maine. As a result, a 105-page report, *Oral Health Access for Maine's Veterans*, was created that illuminated how grave this situation actually was - <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/maine-dental-report-2020.html>
- 3.) The Lunder-Dineen Health Education Alliance of Maine's MOTIVATE program ran a pilot project in the state's six veterans' homes for a three-year period. The program identified the importance of educating nursing home staff about brushing and flossing, when to refer, and when to monitor dental issues with their patients - <https://lunderdineen.org/program/motivate-transforms-oral-health-in-long-term-care/>
- 4.) When the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services Director of Strategic Partnerships/Program Director heard Mainely Teeth speak at a training seminar about their Mobile Dental Clinic and their effectiveness bringing oral healthcare directly to patients, especially in rural areas of the state, it seemed to be a plausible solution to bring oral healthcare to veterans residing in long-term care facilities. Mainely Teeth's initial mission was to work with school children (K-12), and the Program Manager asked them if they would consider providing care to veterans in rural areas and in nursing homes. In 2023, a partnership and a pilot program were formed.

2. Who is the target population?

Veterans who don't have dental insurance, cannot afford to pay out of pocket, and who aren't categorized as having a 100% service-connected disability under the VA's Schedule of Rating Disabilities or who don't fit the VA Class I-IV qualifications, (e.g., a former P.O.W., a patient who needs dental care prior to receiving a medical procedure, participating in the VA's Homeless Veterans Program, a veteran who served in the Gulf War for 90 days or more, etc.)

The MVDN strives to serve minority veterans including - rural, elder, female, LGBTQ+, Native American Veterans, as well as recently discharged veterans, and veterans residing in long-term care facilities, whose access to dental care is limited unless a family member makes oral healthcare arrangements for them, or services are brought directly to them.

3. Provide relevant background information.

When an individual serves in the U.S. Military, all their oral healthcare needs are provided free of charge. Upon discharge, unless a veteran is 100% service-connected or meets the VA's Class I-IV qualifications, they are on their own to access and pay for dental care. For many, this is financially unattainable or logistically impossible – cost of care, lack of transportation, residence in a rural area, distance to travel, inability to find a dentist or one who is accepting new patients.

Veterans often forgo maintaining their oral healthcare, which ultimately leads to larger dental problems and to other negative health issues – infections, heart disease, and diabetes, which could have been avoided if they had simply had the means to access preventative oral healthcare. Checkups and cleanings aren't cost prohibitive; they enhance veterans' overall health.

4. Describe the project goals.

This project aims to increase access to dental care and resources for veterans residing in Maine by developing an oral health network of community-based dental and veteran-supportive organizations in local communities.

Resources, Data, Impact, and Outcomes (750-word limit)

1. What resources were/are necessary to support the project (e.g., staffing, volunteers, funding, partnerships, collaborations with other agencies or organizations)?

The MVDN is run by a team of two Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services employees who handle all the marketing, application screening, communications, connection to dental clinics, accounting of clinics grant funding, grant distribution recommendations, and end of year reporting.

The program's funding source is:

- Northeast Delta Dental \$35,000 (2021), \$100,000 (2022), \$200,000 (2023).
- The Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation and their partners - \$35,000 in 2023.

The MVDN collaborates with a total network of 22 non-profit dental clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, the State's two dental teaching schools, and one mobile dental clinic. Based on MVDN yearly funding recommendations, all grant money is sent directly to the participating dental clinics by the grant sponsor.

2. (a) What process measure data are being collected (e.g., sealants placed, people hired, etc.)?

Each participating dental clinic receives an MVDN Excel spreadsheet to track the date of service, number of veterans treated, gender, age, Current Dental Procedures Codes which indicate the type of procedures - diagnostic, preventative, restorative, oral surgery, major restorative, emergencies, dentures, how many procedures, fees, and amount of grant funding remaining.

(b) What outcome measure data are being collected (e.g., improvement in health)?

Improved access to dental care, frequency of connection to dental clinics, reduces emergency dental situations, dentures, improved oral health, and increased access for minority veterans.

(c) How frequently are data collected?

The MVDN team is in constant contact with the 22 dental clinics we work with. We ask for a mid-year update and are considering increasing to quarterly reporting in 2024. The dental clinics are required to maintain a simple Excel spreadsheet until the grant funding runs out or through December 31 to track the funds they received. The reports are due as soon as the dental clinics run out of funding or no later than the first Friday in the New Year, and this data provides funding context for the next year's round of grants to the dental clinics.

3. How are the results shared?

The spreadsheets are discussed with each of the dental clinics individually and by doing so it helps the MVDN Team establish how many veterans the clinics can work with in the coming year. The spreadsheet provides an opportunity to discuss any updates or changes that need to be considered by both parties, e.g., change in program procedures, loss of a dentist, clinic expansion, etc. An end of year report is also provided to Northeast Delta Dental, and the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation by mid-January of the new year, every year.

Budget and Sustainability

(500-word limit)

Note: Charts and tables may be used.

1. What is/was the budget for the project?

In 2021 Northeast Delta Dental provided \$35,000 for a pilot project. In 2022 they increased program funding to \$100,000, and in 2023 to \$200,000. New partners, the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation and their partners donated \$35,000 in 2023.

The program's typical grant size is \$500 per veteran. More can be allotted, but that is done on a case-by-case basis after discussion between the dental clinic and the MVDN Team. Often times, veterans like to, "pay it forward," and if they don't use up their grant, they ask the dental office to, "Give it to the next veteran who needs it," which frees up additional grant funding for veterans who need more extensive dental care.

The MVDN tracks how much grant funding each veteran utilizes per year and if they utilize the full amount and still need additional work they are encouraged to contact the program in the new year.

How is the project funded (e.g., federal, national, state, local, private funding)?

The MVDN is funded solely through the generosity of our private grant sponsors – Northeast Delta Dental and the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation.

2. What is the sustainability plan for the project?

Looking towards 2024, a Program Expansion Proposal for an additional \$100,000 in grant funding, was submitted to Northeast Delta Dental and the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation.

Program leadership was also chosen to participate in the American Institute of Dental Public Health's year-long Leadership Program and a one-week Federal Service Immersion Program Internship in Washington, D.C., to learn about policy creation and to work on a sustainability plan for the MVDN.

Lessons Learned

(750-word limit)

(a) What lessons were learned that would be useful for others seeking to implement a similar project?

1.) It is essential to create a webpage that provides all the pertinent veterans' oral health information available in your state. We realized this was an issue from the beginning due to the number of requests for care the Bureau was receiving. There wasn't a centralized location for this type of information for veterans and their families, e.g., dental clinics contact information, veterans' dental insurance options, the dental report, press releases, and a link to the MVDN application, so we added it to the Bureau's website for ease of reference.

2.) Start with the Federally Qualified Health Centers first to form a veterans' dental network because they already track veterans at intake and have an internal list of patients. We found this out after the network was formed, and it would have been a great source of outreach to begin with if had we realized it.

(b) Any unanticipated outcomes?

U.S. Senator Angus King, Jr. and his staff are interested in improving veterans' access to oral healthcare and are looking at best practices that could be replicated nationwide. Program leadership debriefed them on the MVDN

The MVDN partnered with the Lunder-Dineen Health Education Alliance of Maine in 2021 to bring a free, internet-based, veteran-centric Continuing Medical Education (CME) program, *Addressing Veterans' Oral Healthcare Needs*, to oral health and medical professionals which provides (1) CME credit. Lunder-Dineen provided module design assistance, support, and access to a learning management system for the MVDN's ongoing efforts to educate oral health and healthcare professionals.

The Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services received the 2022 VA Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award for Innovative State Programs for its Maine Veterans' Dental Network from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The addition of Mainely Teeth's Mobile Dental Unit allowed us to run a pilot program in rural, Downeast Maine for underserved veterans and residents living at the Maine Veterans' Home in Machias. The program was very well received, and we hope to replicate it in 2024.

Is there anything you would have done differently?

The MVDN has been an educational journey from day one and there isn't anything that we would have done differently, because we needed to learn along the way since our background wasn't that of an oral healthcare professional.

Resources

List resources developed by this project that may be useful to others (e.g., guidelines, infographics, policies, educational materials). Include links if available.

Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services Report - *Oral Health Access for Maine's Veterans* - <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/maine-dental-report-2020.html>

Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services Dental Access and Information webpage - https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/dental_access_and_information.html

MVDN Program Brochure - <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/MVDN-Tri-fold.pdf>

MVDN Program Flyer - https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/MVDN_Flyer.pdf

2021 MVDN Press Release - <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/maine-veterans-dental-network.pdf>

2022 MVDN Press Release – <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/MVDN.pdf>

2023 MVDN Press Release - <https://www.maine.gov/governor/mills/index.php/news/governor-mills-announces-maine-veterans-dental-network-continue-services-200000-grant>

2023 MVDN Press Release - <https://www.maine.gov/veterans/benefits/healthcare/MVDN2.pdf>

VA Abraham Pillar of Excellence Award - <https://www.wiscassetnewspaper.com/article/maine-veterans-dental-network-receives-excellence-award/157535>

Lunder-Dineen Health Education Alliance of Maine and Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services continuing medical education program *Addressing Veterans' Oral Healthcare Needs* - <https://cpd.partners.org/cme.lunderdineen.org/content/addressing-veterans%E2%80%99-oral-healthcare-needs#group-tabs-node-course-default4>

Lunder-Dineen Health Education Alliance of Maine MOTIVATE Program - <https://lunderdineen.org/program/motivate-transforms-oral-health-in-long-term-care/>

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To Be Completed By ASTDD	
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