



# Evidence-Based Policies: A Key Element of State Oral Health Infrastructure

An important Essential Public Health Service is to “Develop and implement policies and systematic plans that support state and community oral health efforts.” Development of socio-political systems and policy changes that support oral health plans and interventions are important to the long-term sustainability of state governmental oral health programs. The process of policymaking guides decisions about program priorities as well as resource allocation and appropriation. **Strong evidence-based policies at both the state and local levels are necessary for progress toward achieving optimal oral health and reducing disparities.**

A report, *State Oral Health Infrastructure and Capacity: Reflecting on Progress and Charting the Future*, by the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors,<sup>1</sup> reviews efforts and progress in state oral health infrastructure and capacity building since 2000 and provides lessons learned and recommendations to enhance state and local program ability to fulfill critical roles. The report outlines critical elements for building and sustaining successful state oral health programs. Evidence-based policies are key to building and sustaining strong and vibrant oral health programs.

## Ten Key Recommendations from the Report for Implementing Policies\*

1. Perform an environmental scan of state and local oral health policies, laws and regulations.
2. Use tools such as the CDHP/CDC Oral Health Policy Assessment Tool to differentiate stakeholder input, assess opportunities and develop a plan for policy and system changes.
3. Identify and monitor public policies that promote oral health and evaluate the impact of policy changes.
4. Assess public opinions, awareness, knowledge and behaviors and use the data to design effective communication strategies to promote oral health and the importance of oral health to overall health of the population throughout the lifespan.
5. Implement policies to support culturally relevant, evidence-based programs that prevent disease and promote oral health across the lifespan.
6. Promote and support the translation/transferring of research evidence into promising policies and plans at state/local levels and evaluate the impact on oral health disparities.
7. Develop policies and plans that promote the use of oral health literacy and cultural competency resources to state and local programs for designing materials and messages for diverse audiences.
8. Participate in national, state and local policy development and strategic planning efforts.
9. Continue to create, update and share state practice examples on priority topics for the ASTDD Best Practices collection.
10. Promote the use of oral health literacy and cultural competency resources to state and local programs for designing materials and messages for diverse audiences.

\*Science has documented the impact that environmental and policy interventions can make in improving health outcomes, however, federal and state laws may restrict or prohibit certain policy activities as they relate to federal and state funding sources.

## What can you as a policymaker do to support state oral health infrastructure and capacity building?

- Review the findings, lessons learned and recommendations from the Infrastructure and Capacity Building Report.
- Champion evidence-based public policies that promote oral health.
- Provide coordinated and sustainable base funding for federal, state and local oral health programs.
- Position oral health programs within the public health agency structure where they can adequately address the 10 Essential Public Health Services to Promote Oral Health, especially in relation to policy development and planning.
- Participate in state or local oral health coalitions.

Policymakers can chart the course for the work of the state oral health program, thus building capacity to address oral health challenges.

### STATE ORAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE ELEMENTS



<sup>1</sup> The full report is available on the ASTDD website at [http://www.astdd.org/docs/Infrastructure\\_Enhancement\\_Project\\_Feb\\_2012.pdf](http://www.astdd.org/docs/Infrastructure_Enhancement_Project_Feb_2012.pdf)

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