

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



Prepared by the Association of
State and Territorial Dental Directors and the
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State oral health programs (SOHP) are dental public health programs administered by state public health agencies in all U.S. states, District of Columbia and territories/jurisdictions to perform essential public health functions such as monitoring and collecting data on oral health status, developing policies to address community oral health needs and engage partners and assuring access to evidence-based oral health prevention and treatment services. State dental associations (SDA) are nonprofit professional associations whose members are dentists representing all specialties, including dental public health, who provide the highest professional and ethical care to citizens in all states. Both associations work together and with other partners to address the oral health needs of the U.S. population, particularly those groups with significant oral health disparities.

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

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

"One of the strengths of our collaboration is in our collective ability to recognize that although we may from time to time be of differing mindsets, we have a similar vision of providing quality oral health care to all our residents."

Wisconsin state dental director, 2011

When issues arise that do not result in consensus, both groups should be clear about how they work to represent the interests and needs of their constituents while still citing the areas of common ground. Although workforce issues can be polarizing nationally and in some states, many states use the issues as a focus for collaboration to initiate legislative and policy changes. Keys to successful collaboration include 1) establishing mutual respect and trust for each other's agendas; 2) promoting each other's programs and acknowledging all volunteer, in-kind and monetary contributions for all events and programs; 3) celebrating successes; 4) evaluating joint efforts and recommending future improvements; and 5) creating transparency in decision making and communication.

ND SOHP and SDA directors

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

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