

State Oral Health Programs:

Leaders in advancing oral health for all



About State Oral Health Programs

A State Oral Health Program (SOHP) is a unit of state government, typically within the public health department. SOHPs collaborate with **state and community partners** to carry out essential public health functions—such as monitoring oral disease rates, developing and implementing prevention programs, and ensuring policies and regulations protect the public’s health. While every state’s program varies in how it is funded and the services it provides, all SOHPs share the goal of improving oral health for all residents of a state. SOHPs:

- Monitor and report on oral health trends and disparities.
- Develop and implement policies and programs to prevent disease.
- Ensure regulations are in place to safeguard the public’s health.
- Adapt services to meet the unique needs and resources of each state.

Driving Statewide Oral Health Impact

SOHPs provide leadership, expertise, and coordination to improve the health of their communities. They track and assess oral disease rates to identify progress and persistent disparities, while promoting prevention strategies and expanding access to affordable care. Using evidence-based practices, they shape policies

and programs that protect and improve health. By building strong partnerships across public and private sectors, they strengthen collective impact. SOHPs also ensure that states have a well-trained and adequate oral health workforce, and they continually evaluate services to measure effectiveness, reach, and quality.

Turning Plans Into Action

SOHPs improve overall health and quality of life through initiatives that combine **policy, prevention, and community support**. They collect and share data, guide planning, and ensure that evidence-based strategies reach the people who need them most. More specifically, they implement and advance:

- **Surveillance and planning:** statewide oral health data systems and improvement plans.
- **Prevention for children:** preschool and school-based programs providing fluoride varnish and dental sealants.
- **Community protection:** monitoring and promoting water fluoridation.
- **Workforce support:** training opportunities, loan repayment, and professional development.
- **Safety and quality:** policies to protect health workers and uphold infection control.
- **Public education:** campaigns that build awareness and encourage healthy habits.

Why Oral Health Matters

Oral health is essential to overall health and quality of life from childhood through adulthood. Poor oral health impacts nutrition, speech, learning, self-esteem, and employment. It can also elevate risk for the prevalence and adverse outcomes of chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. SOHPs help ensure that proven, affordable prevention strategies are available to everyone.



Nearly 1 in 3 U.S. children ages 2–4 have cavities, many untreated.



Many adults especially older individuals lack dental insurance or the means to pay for care.



Oral cancer claims more lives annually than ovarian, cervical, thyroid, or brain cancer.



Oral disease prevention is cost-effective—saving states and families millions in treatment costs.

Strong Partnerships, Stronger Impact

No state program can do it alone. SOHPs rely on a wide network of partners to extend their reach and strengthen their impact. These partnerships bring together expertise, resources, and community trust to create sustainable solutions. Key SOHP collaborators typically include:

- **Professional organizations:** state and local dental and dental hygiene associations, medical societies, and health systems.
- **Community providers:** health centers, tribal clinics, and hospitals.
- **Education partners:** schools, early childhood programs, and universities.
- **Coverage and policy groups:** Medicaid/CHIP programs, dental insurers, advocacy organizations, businesses, and policymakers.

Together, these partnerships improve access to care, reduce disparities, and promote lifelong oral health.

**Oral health is health.
State Oral Health
Programs ensure
everyone has the
opportunity to live,
learn, work, and age
in good health.**

