

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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Oral Health Workforce Assessment

In 2016, the Louisiana Office of Public Health, Bureau of Primary Care and Rural Health (BPCRH) was awarded a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) state grant to support the Louisiana Oral Health Workforce Expansion Program which included the following goals: Establish a Dental Rural Scholars Track Program (RST), establish an Oral Health Recruitment Project and conduct a Dental Health Needs Assessment.

A Dental Health Needs Assessment was conducted, which utilized a collaborative approach looking broadly at oral health in Louisiana. The process included: synthesis of existing data on social, economic, and health indicators; scan of existing oral health services and programs; analysis of information from a survey of oral health stakeholders and providers (N=365); and interviews with oral health and medical providers, school nurses, and public health administrators with a medical degree (n=17).

Key Findings

- Overall, the 365 survey participants responded that there is no shortage of dentists serving those seeking access to oral health care.
- Many people choose not to go to the dentist or feel they cannot afford it, especially for preventive care.
- At both the patient and the provider level, Medicaid reimbursements, both the rate and the paperwork, act as barriers to accessing care, contributing to a lack of providers accepting Medicaid.
- Children's oral health has been improving and the number of children seeing a dentist is increasing, but Louisiana children are still below the national averages according to Healthy People 2020 oral health goals and previous Third Grade Basic Screening Surveys. The results indicated that there is a lot of misinformation about fluoridation being shared with the public, however the data shows majority of providers defend the benefits of fluoridated water.
- There is need for better education about the necessity and importance of preventive dental care, particularly in adults.
- Providing underserved populations access to appropriate dental care is a complex problem. From the limited findings, training more dentists alone to address a "shortage of providers" in dental Health Professional Shortage Area will not be effective in improving access to oral health services.

Lessons Learned:

Enhancing relationships in the dental community to gain better support from dental providers. There were several attempts made to obtain participation. Participation from these high need HPSA parishes, especially in northern Louisiana, continues to be a challenge. Participants included only dental care providers and other healthcare providers' perceptions on oral health care. It did

not include community and utilizers perceptions. However, there was a variation of partners involved in the overall project. The program would consider bringing together focus groups and conduct regional presentations.

Overall challenge:

The Great Flood in August and the federally recognized flooding that occurred in 2016. These disasters caused a mass amount of business, schools, etc. closures which shifted priorities and resulted in a project implementation delay.

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