

## Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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**Practice Number:** 25010  
**Submitted By:** Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging (COHA)  
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### Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging

The mission of the Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging (COHA; [www.micoha.org](http://www.micoha.org)) of Michigan is to improve the oral health of older people through advocacy, professional education, public education, and research by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and evidence-based practices. This mission is achieved through COHA's organizational goals: 1) to be a resource for providers of care for the aging and special needs populations; 2) to promote the implementation of policies that support evidence based strategies that provide optimal oral health for the aging; and 3) to develop collaborative partnerships that address the oral health needs of the aging and special needs populations.

COHA workgroups are established to accomplish projects and tasks. The current workgroups include Research Workgroup, Education Workgroup, Communications and Development Workgroup, Providers and Practice Models Workgroup, and Aging Issues Workgroup.

Projects of the Aging Issues workgroup have included lecturing to, providing consultation to, and serving on boards of health services organizations, providing assistance in the development of the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council's Health Issues Workgroup Oral Health Position Paper, and collaborating with an Area Agency on Aging (AAA's) and students from the University of Michigan School of Dentistry to collect oral health care supplies which were disseminated through the AAA's Meals on Wheels program.

The focus of education in COHA is three pronged including 1) the education of dental professionals, 2) the education of health services providers, and 3) the education of patients and their caregivers. Identification, creation, and dissemination of educational resources for these groups have been accomplished through lecture, in print and by electronic modality.

With the assistance of Delta Dental and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MCHHS), COHA surveyed all dental professionals in the state of Michigan to determine and define current oral health care provided as well as what providers were interested in doing in the future to provide care to this population (<http://www.micoha.org/vulnerable-elderly-survey.html>). From this project, MDCH developed a Vulnerable Elderly Provider Directory for the state (<http://www.micoha.org/provider-directory.html>).

In collaboration with non-profit agencies, COHA has sponsored Dental Days which utilize a Michigan Public Act 161 model for hygienists to provide care to underserved populations.

### Lessons Learned:

The activities of COHA described above are intimately linked and are a progression of working through identification of access to care challenges and of resources available and interested in addressing these issues. The doors opening and networking opportunities continue to grow. Not all persons in the fields of dentistry, aging, and government are interested and able to participate, but there are plenty of stakeholders wanting to move forward but are unable on their own to connect to collaborative partners.

The need for access to oral health care for the aging is a national challenge. The Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging is a piece of the larger puzzle that must be put together to address the oral health care for the aging of our nation. At state levels as well as at the national level COHAs including stakeholders beyond the dental profession must be established to work collaboratively to prepare for the challenges in caring for an ever growing and increasingly dentate population group.

Although there were many positive outcomes, there have been challenges to implementing certain strategies because of philosophical disagreements relating to proposed legislation of mobile dentistry and regulation of collaborative practice programs. It has been critical that COHA not promote the mantra of the organizations of some of its members over others. These disagreements cannot be easily resolved. Therefore, it has been critical for COHA to focus on its priorities of education and improving access care. Through its activities, COHA has been able elucidate some of the challenges and improvements that regulations and legislation can have on access to oral health care for the aging.

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