



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

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Oral Health Action Plan and Follow-up for Minnesota Head Start

The Head Start community in Minnesota has long recognized the barriers to oral health and dental care services faced by Head Start children and families. In December 2002, with funds from the Association for State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD), the **2002 Minnesota Head Start Oral Health Forum** was convened. The forum was a collaborative initiative between the Minnesota Head Start Association, the State Head Start Collaboration Office, and the Minnesota Association for Community Dentistry. The goal was to heighten awareness about the specific oral health problems facing Minnesota's youngest, most vulnerable population and to create a statewide agenda to improve access, education, prevention, and treatment services for Head Start-eligible children and families.

Stimulated by the discussions in the one-day Head Start health forum event, a broad group of stakeholders—including the Head Start community, the dental community, state health and human service agencies, health plan administrators, county administrators, child advocates, and parents—continued the dialog. In May 2003, stakeholders developed and released a **Statewide Head Start Oral Health Action Plan**, which inspired the implementing innovative, model approaches to oral health service delivery for low-income children and families. These approaches include:

- **The Tooth Book: A Guide to Caring for Your Child's Teeth** – With funding from the Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota, the Minnesota Head Start Association and Parents In Community Action, Inc., Head Start with health advisors across Minnesota developed *The Tooth Book* - a culturally appropriate guide to caring for children's oral health from birth through teenage years. Since its release in 2004, 30,000 copies have been distributed to Head Start parents and presented during Head Start home visits and parent education sessions. The book is available in dual language formats: Spanish/English, Somali/English and Hmong/English.
- **Early Head Start (EHS) Primary Prevention Oral Health Campaign** – With funding from the Delta Dental Plan of Minnesota, the Minnesota Head Start Association contracted with consultants from the University of Minnesota and Marquette University School of Dentistry to develop a unique training program for Early Head Start home visitors. Staff learned to conduct caries risk assessment on infants and toddlers and to teach age-appropriate preventive strategies to parents. Through this training, home visitors are able to identify early signs of oral and environmental risk factors and to make appropriate referrals to dental professionals.
- **Apple Tree Dental/Head Start Teledentistry Project** – The Teledentistry Project, planned for and piloted in five Minnesota Head Start programs with federal funding, is an innovative approach to reduce barriers encountered by low-income families with young children in accessing dentists and receiving dental examinations. In the Teledentistry model, dental hygienists provide on-site services at Head Start facilities including capturing images of children's teeth so that an offsite collaborating dentist can review findings and make the diagnosis needed to schedule treatment. This model maximizes the dentists' and Head Start families' time, and emphasizes prevention, education and establishing dental homes. The pilot project was highly successful and partners have requested funding to implement it across Minnesota.
- **Oral Healthcare System Model** – The Head Start community was also among the stakeholders involved in efforts led by Apple Tree Dental to develop a new Oral Healthcare System model featuring patient-centered, evidence-based strategies that will be piloted in 2006. Its goal is to expand access and enhance the delivery of oral healthcare services to people of all ages enrolled in Minnesota's Health Care Programs (MHCP). This and other policy reforms were key components of the Statewide Head Start Oral Health Action Plan.

In 2005, the Minnesota Head Start Association received ASTDD follow-up funding to convene another meeting of Health Coordinators and Partners to discuss Head Start oral health models, provide updates on state activities related to the 2002 Action Plan, and to review oral health needs. The **Minnesota Association for Community Dentistry Spring Forum**, held on May 6, 2005, featured new approaches including outreach efforts to culturally diverse populations, approaches to nutrition education, fluoride varnish efforts and xylitol product development. With ASTDD funding, a 2005 Progress Report was created and graphically highlighted model approaches, a timeline of events related to Minnesota's Action Plan accomplishments and next steps. The goal is to use this document to promote broader public and policymaker awareness to encourage expansion of new approaches to oral health service delivery targeting at risk and underserved families.

The leadership of groups including the Dental Access Advisory Committee of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Association for Community Dentistry (MACD) and Apple Tree Dental is advancing a progressive oral health policy and practice agenda. The Minnesota Head Start Association and its members are committed to accomplish the steps set forth in the Statewide Head Start Oral Health Action Plan and intend to continue its work to advocate and encourage good oral health for Head Start families. Minnesota's oral health stakeholders are sharing the **Vision for Oral Health** adopted by the Minnesota Head Start Association in December 2002:

- Oral health is a vital component of good health, and dental care is a critical element of health care.
- Innovative approaches can help low-income, ethnically and racially diverse children and families, including those with disabilities, to overcome oral health disparities.
- There is a way to broaden oral health services to all those in need through community-based, participatory partnerships and investment from all stakeholders.
- Solutions to Head Start oral health problems include effective oral health access, prevention, and treatment strategies, which require:
 - Expanding the role of allied dental professionals,
 - Increasing the roles of non-dental health professionals,
 - Replicating effective oral health service delivery models in underserved areas, and
 - Improving administration of public oral health programs.

The combined ASTDD funding for the 2002 Minnesota Head Start Oral Health Forum and 2005 follow-up activities was \$7,500. Grant-funded projects and other activities that developed as a result of the Statewide Head Start Oral Health Action Plan have surpassed \$350,000 in funding. New partnership opportunities continue to be explored.

Contact Person(s) for Inquiries:

Gayle Kelly, Minnesota Head Start Association, 904 Valley Drive, Duluth, MN 55804, Phone: 218-728-1091, Fax: 218-728-0083, Email: macnick@cpinternet.com