

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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Working with a Coalition in Missouri

The Missouri Coalition for Oral Health (MCOH) has been a very strong partner for the Office of Dental Health (ODH). Under the leadership of Gary Harbison Executive Director of MCOH has been our partner for legislative advocacy, special program funding, access to care, special needs patients and funding for the ODH. Reorganized with help from the Oral Health Program of the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health in 2012, MCOH has worked to create a broad base of constituents, including dental professionals, community oral health advocates, legislators and funding agencies. The MCOH organizes an annual Oral Health Policy Conference that provides an opportunity for the stakeholders in oral health to have a forum to meet and present issues as well as solutions. An Oral Health Legislative Awareness Event is held in conjunction with the conference. Between 35 and 45 members of MCOH spend the morning speaking with legislators about MCOH policy priorities. MCOH has many accomplishments, including funding for and reinstatement of the State Dental Director position, 2015, Fluoridation Notification Statute, 2017, reinstatement of Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits, 2016 and Fluoridation Advocacy.

Associated Costs: MO Department of Health and Senior Services does not directly support the efforts of MCOH. MCOH has become a contractor for some services for the Office of Dental Health. For instance, helping with fluoridation education for Local Public Health Agency, LPHAs.

Outcomes Achieved: The major outcomes (2015-2018) from the efforts of MCOH are the successful reinstatement of the Dental Director position for Missouri, the Office of Dental Health, 2017 and the passage of the Fluoride Notification Statute.

Lessons Learned:

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1. Not every foundation values oral health advocacy, therefore grant funding for MCOH has decreased from 2016 to 2020 threatening its existence. MCOH has taken on other opportunities based on the talents of their employees to provide services for grants and programs in the area of Oral Health
2. MCOH has become an excellent partner to improve communication with the public. The annual symposium provides the ODH the opportunity to provide information to stakeholders and members of the public about key oral health issues. Their symposium and presentations have improved communications with policy makers as well.
3. MCOH has become one of the most valuable sources of information and advocacy for oral health issues to the Missouri Legislature. The ODH cannot directly lobby legislators or other local government officials but MCOH can carry the message.
4. Partnering with local and national funding organizations is key to sustainability. Dependence on only grant funds is a problem when funders change their goals. Good fiscal management has been essential to sustainability.
5. Hiring a Director that is skilled and pragmatic is important for MCOH's policy direction. The current Director has the experience in Legislative Matters to know what is attainable. His experience has helped MCOH set goals that are attainable
6. Bylaws of MCOH mandate that policy priorities are decided by Consensus of the Board. This has prevented one group from taking over MCOH and using it as an instrument for only their issues.

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