



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

Practice Number: 45001
Submitted By: Rhode Island Department of Health, Office of Primary Care
Submission Date: October 2005
Last Updated: October 2005

Rhode Island Early Childhood Oral Health Action Plan

On May 17, 2004, the Oral Health Program, Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Head Start Association convened a statewide Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) Oral Health Forum to identify access barriers, propose potential resolutions, and build support for improving the oral health of HS/EHS children and their families. The federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau sponsored the Forum through a cooperative agreement with the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors. Additional federal support was received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local partners, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Delta Dental of Rhode Island, and Neighborhood Health of Rhode Island.

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START ORAL HEALTH FORUM

The Forum assembled a broad group of stakeholders who shared expertise, best practices, and collaborative solutions to develop an Early Childhood Oral Health Action Plan for Rhode Island. Nearly 120 participants attended the Forum, including representatives from HS/EHS (staff and parents), dental professional societies, primary care medical providers, hospital-based dental programs, community health centers, elementary and secondary schools, higher education, community-based social service organizations, child advocacy groups, third party payers, state agencies, and the Administration for Children and Families, Region I.

The morning sessions highlighted the Rhode Island perspective, featuring presentations on access to care barriers encountered by children/families in the state's HS/EHS programs, oral disease data, prevention opportunities in pediatric dentistry, and the pediatrician's role in oral health assessment. Keynote speaker, Adolph Brown III, PsyD, a nationally renowned child/family advocate, consultant to U.S. Surgeons General, and a graduate of Head Start, validated both the Head Start experience and the importance of oral health as a foundation for future success.

Based on personal/professional expertise, Forum participants were assigned to one of three breakout groups (Oral Disease Prevention/Community Awareness, Oral Health Education/Training, Oral Health Access/Financing/Infrastructure) in the afternoon. Through facilitated discussion, participants were asked to: 1) identify current issues/problems and service/data gaps; 2) propose potential resolutions/promising strategies with timelines; 3) identify resources/likely collaborators; and 4) discuss outcome measures/evaluation to track progress over time.

The total cost for the Forum was approximately \$11,000. ASTDD provided \$5,000; MCHB \$300 and CDC \$100. In addition, the RI State Office of Rural Health contributed \$2,600 and local sponsors (Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI, Delta Dental of RI, and Neighborhood Health Plan of RI) donated \$3,000 to support keynote speaker honoraria, conference facility, and other associated meeting expenses.

ACTION PLAN

Building on recommendations developed in 2001 by the Rhode Island Senate Commission on Oral Health and using the promising strategies developed by breakout groups during the Forum, a draft of the Early Childhood Oral Health Action Plan was prepared and distributed to Forum participants for

their review and comments prior to finalizing the Action Plan. Consistent with the Call to Action and the State Senate Commission, the **Rhode Island Early Childhood Oral Health Action Plan** seeks to provide a framework for advancing goals, objectives, and actions that are science-based, culturally sensitive, and routinely evaluated. The Action Plan listed inputs, issues/problems, promising strategies, products, and proposed outcomes. The Action Plan recognized the following promising strategies:

- Expand & coordinate statewide oral health surveillance systems
- Revise licensure requirements & practice regulations
- Provide incentives for oral health professionals working with underserved populations
- Expand oral health advocacy efforts targeting policymakers
- Integrate oral health into the State's Successful Start Initiative
- Provide/expand training & mentoring for primary care providers, Head Start/other staff working with young children, oral health providers willing to treat very young children
- Provide/expand community health & service learning for dental and dental hygiene students
- Promote dental careers to science-minded high school & college students
- Expand oral health professional recruitment & retention efforts
- Promote/leverage resources for population-based prevention interventions (dental sealants, fluoride)
- Develop/update oral health curricula & resource guides for young children & families
- Create a cross-cultural oral health public awareness/disease prevention campaign
- Expand RIte Care/Medicaid transportation & interpreter services
- Incorporate a Dental Benefits Manager (DBM) model to restructure the Medicaid dental delivery system
- Revise RIte Care/Medicaid dental benefits; increase public & commercial reimbursement rates

The distal outcomes of the Action Plan are to improve the oral health of preschool children in Rhode Island by reducing the prevalence of early childhood caries and unintentional oro-facial injuries, increasing the quality of life, and reducing disparities in oral health outcomes.

PRODUCTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE ACTION PLAN

1. The Forum provided an opportunity to launch the Rhode Island Early Childhood Oral Health [ECOH] Coalition. At the close of the Forum, more than 50 participants indicated a willingness to serve as members of the Coalition, a public/private/not-for-profit partnership that will assist in implementing the Action Plan, improving access to oral health promotion/disease prevention services for HS/EHS children and families, and tracking progress towards the Action Plan goals and objectives over time. During the first year, the Coalition membership continued to increase by more than 50% to include 80 individuals and 38 stakeholder organizations.
2. The ECOH Coalition continues to meet quarterly to track the progress of the Action Plan. To commemorate the Coalition's first anniversary, the 2005 report on the progress to date and the 2005 Early Childhood Oral Health Honor Roll were published and widely distributed.
3. To expand training opportunities/promising strategies identified in the Action Plan, the Oral Health Program collaborated with the RI Head Start Collaborative Office, Comprehensive Child Care Services Program, and RI Head Start Association to plan/sponsor the *Family Advocate Training Conference*. The event convened 120 family advocates/family workers who provide counseling via regular home visits to Head Start and Comprehensive Child Care families with more than 3,500 children statewide. The purpose of the training was to increase the knowledge of best practices and prevention opportunities related to oral health, mental health, and childhood nutrition among the family advocates and to facilitate a better understanding of effective prevention practices among the families they serve. Family advocates are utilizing the training manual resources during home visits and as a reference/resource guide.

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