

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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West Virginia Oral Health Surveillance System

Prior to 2010, West Virginia (WV) had very limited data on the oral health status of its population. Through a contracted partnership with the Marshall University School of Medicine and funding from the DentaQuest Foundation, the West Virginia Oral Health Program began to develop its oral health surveillance system in an effort to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of oral public health initiatives, as well as inform future project development. Within three years, these efforts supported completion of basic screening surveys (BSSs) for the Pre-K, third grade, adult and older adult/senior populations, as well as surveys of consumers of dental services, the state dental workforce (dentists and dental hygienists), and ongoing monitoring of other available data sources through a full-time oral health epidemiologist/program evaluator position.

Since 2013, oral health surveillance is now an established component of the state oral health program (SOHP) and is conducted following the 2013-2018 Oral Health Surveillance Plan. Surveillance has also been expanded to include new populations, including being the first state to complete a perinatal BSS (2014). Despite recent economic changes requiring the support of surveillance to be restructured, the state oral health program recognizes that surveillance is a critical component of program sustainability. Data is needed to “tell the story” to funders, to support policy development, and to monitor continuous quality improvement around current projects and future initiatives.

Lessons Learned:

- Utilize existing surveillance models (i.e., ASTDD BSS) and available data sources; don’t reinvent the wheel.
- Collaboration, partnerships and relationships are critical in development of surveillance.
- Weather can be a barrier, often creating a demand for the need of more time to complete.
- When dealing with rural areas with sparse populations, often times participation numbers are low on any given site visit. This creates the need to return multiple times to complete the required number of surveys.
- Webinars can be utilized to calibrate screeners.
- Oral health champions are integral to project success and sustainability. A variety of perspectives and voices are needed to make changes within both policy and practice.

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