

Dental Public Health Activity Descriptive Summary

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Improving Oral Health of WIC Enrollees Through Effective Collaborations

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health Oral Health Program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program partnered with the Wisconsin Dental Association (WDA) to develop two educational/training resources, an interactive flip chart and an oral health resource guide. The resources target WIC parents/caregivers and the interdisciplinary providers who work with WIC families in an effort to enhance knowledge and awareness of the importance of proper oral health. The flip chart "*Something to Smile About*" incorporates pertinent oral health messages that the WDA and WIC Program developed to meet the varying needs of parents/caregivers from pregnancy to early childhood. The complex nature of oral disease was simplified yet comprehensive enough so that providers with limited oral health knowledge could more confidently convey oral health information. The "*Oral Health Resource Guide*" was developed to assist providers and parents/caregivers to visually identify oral conditions from the early stage white lesions through the development of more serious carious lesion. The WIC Program felt that pictures that parents could view along with the flip chart would be very valuable and would initiate conversation with providers.

In 2010 the resources were presented at the National Women, Infants and Children Conference in Milwaukee. Participants representing numerous state WIC agencies provided valuable input related to effective messaging that they felt would help to strengthen the final documents.

To augment the educational/training resources the Wisconsin Oral Health Program continues to provide on site training and technical assistance to providers in oral health risk assessment and referral mechanisms based on the urgency of patient needs, anticipatory guidance and the benefits and application of fluoride varnish.

Wisconsin has a long history of developing effective prevention based programs utilizing the strengths built on strong collaborative relationships. The integration of oral health into primary healthcare has been one of the Wisconsin Oral Health Program's successful initiatives. Creating multiple access points by engaging local health departments, clinic systems, Head Start agencies, private providers and community advocates promotes broad exposure to prevention messages that reach many of Wisconsin's children and families. The Wisconsin Division of Public Health Bureau of Community Health Promotion encourages program integration to provide healthy living across the lifespan. This approach has promoted efforts by all Bureau programs to develop relationships and projects that complement one another to improve the health and well being of all Wisconsin residents.

Lessons Learned:

Developing collaborations that have been derailed due to misperceptions and schedules takes patience, education and the creation of mutual respect among partners. Having everyone at the table to discuss opinions, priorities and potential barriers proved to be a very effective way to find common ground and create a positive working relationship. Educating all partners about individual agencies/programs including strengths, resources and limitations was integral in assuring open and productive dialogue related to the oral health messages contained in the flip chart and accompanying oral health resource guide.

Secondly yet just as important as positive dialogue was the idea of not recreating the wheel. We "borrowed" the initial format for the flip chart from one that Alabama had done several years ago. Having a framework for discussion helped to move the process forward in a much more efficient manner.

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