

GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATE-LEVEL ORAL HEALTH ISSUE BRIEFS

Two Key Questions To Ask Prior to Development of the Issue Brief

1. What are the goals and objectives?

Examples of Goals and Objectives for Washington, DC

- *To raise awareness of the role oral health plays in the overall health and school readiness of children and to highlight strategies to improve access to children’s oral health services*
- *Present the issue brief at a series of planning meetings with various stakeholders in DC with the overarching goal of linking oral health screening and care to the citywide effort to improve school readiness.*

Examples of Goals and Objectives for Idaho

- *To raise general awareness about the importance of oral health across the lifespan and highlight strategies to expand access to oral health care services*
- *Utilize the issue brief to help build consensus among the Idaho Oral Health Alliance regarding the key oral health strategies the group would like to advocate for over the next couple of years and to complement the release of a new Five-Year Oral Health Strategic Plan*

2. Who is the target audience?

Examples of Stakeholders Targeted in Washington, DC

- *Howard University Dental Clinic*
- *DC City Council members*
- *Deputy Mayor for Education’s staff person for early childhood education*
- *Early Care Education Administration*
- *DC Dental Society*

Examples of Stakeholders Targeted in Idaho

- *State legislature*
- *Division of Medicaid*
- *State oral health professional associations*
- *District Health Offices*
- *Private foundations*

Major Components of the Oral Health Issue Brief

1. **Title.** The title should catch the attention of the reader and compel him/her to read on. It should therefore be bold, descriptive, and relevant.
2. **Context and description of the problem.** This section of the brief should convince the target audience that a current and urgent problem exists which requires them to take action. The context and importance of the problem is both the introductory and first building block of the brief. The following elements should be included:
 - *Statement of the problem*
 - *Short overview of the major causes of the problem*
 - *Statement of the public health and policy implications of the problem.*
3. **Extent of the problem.** Present data that describe the magnitude and intensity of the problem (e.g., oral health surveillance data, dental service utilization data, cost estimates for oral health).

4. **Critique of current approaches.** The brief should detail the shortcomings of the current approach or options available to address the problem and illustrate both the need for change and focus of where change needs to occur. The following elements should be included:
 - *Overview of policies and programs currently being implemented*
 - *Why and how the current approaches are inadequate (e.g., current approaches are only reaching a fraction of the population in need, there are insufficient resources available, approaches are too narrowly focused)*
5. **Recommendations for action.** List specific practical steps or measures that need to be implemented to more effectively address the problem and overcome the shortcomings of previous strategies.
6. **Literature cited.** Provide citations for background research included in the brief, particularly for data.

Lessons Learned from DC and ID Issue Briefs

- **Brevity is key.** The inclusion of substantial background research and narrative description can easily increase the length of the brief. It is therefore critical to use short, concise language and limit evidence to only the most important and impactful data points.
- **Be careful of wording.** Be mindful that there is a high level of controversy and/or lack of agreement regarding some oral health promotion strategies (e.g., increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates, changing state dental practice acts to expand clinical role of mid-level dental providers, guidelines for the safe delivery of dental services to pregnant women). Be sure that proposed recommendations are reflective of input and consensus from a wide array of stakeholders and from sound evidence from the literature.
- **Allow adequate time for revisions and formatting.** The large number of stakeholders that are asked to contribute to the issue brief requires allocating sufficient time to incorporate all feedback and to subsequently streamline the document to keep it at a reasonable length. In addition, it is advisable to hold off on major formatting until the most of the text and data figures/charts have been finalized; it is much easier to edit the document before it is imported into graphical software for formatting.
- **Utilize a number of visual tools to catch readers' eyes.** The issue brief should create a favorable impression by having a professional appearance, being easy to read through, and drawing the reader to important and alarming information. This can be accomplished through the use of such tools as colors, logos, photos, tables and charts, illustrative quotes, and text boxes.