

What is a NACDD Oral Health Opportunity Grant?



The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD), with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has provided Oral Health Opportunity Grants to more than a dozen state health departments over the past several years. The grants are competitively awarded to states that demonstrate a commitment to improving oral health surveillance and increasing access to and use of services intended to improve oral health among older adults.

One of the primary goals of the NACDD Oral Health Opportunity Grants has been to advance implementation of the Basic Screening Survey (BSS) for older adults. The BSS was developed by the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD), with funding from the CDC, in response to the need for improved data on oral health status and access to dental care. The Oral Health Opportunity Grants have advanced implementation of the BSS by supporting states in their efforts to develop oral health surveillance plans, pilot the BSS for older adults, and/or conduct a state-wide BSS for older adults.

In 2012, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services was awarded a NACDD Oral Health Opportunity Grant to assess the oral health status of a segment of older adults attending selected senior centers and congregate meal sites in New Hampshire. The Basic Screening Survey (BSS) – Older Adults was used to gather data on numerous oral health indicators, including loss of teeth, and self-reported dental visits. The purpose of this survey was to improve the health of older adults by collecting and using data that fill a gap in New Hampshire's Oral Health Surveillance System.

What key activities were conducted in New Hampshire?

In New Hampshire, a convenience sample of older adults attending six geographically distributed senior centers and congregate meal sites in the state was selected and everyone utilizing services at the selected sites was invited to receive an oral health screening. Six dental hygienists, experienced in the use of the BSS to assess students' oral health in the schools, were trained to uniformly assess the oral health status of the older adults. Assessments were brief, non-invasive, and included a visual assessment of the mouth and teeth using a disposable dental mirror. In addition, screened participants were asked to answer questions related to tobacco use, availability of a dental home and access to dental care. Data were gathered on standardized forms, entered into a database, and analyzed using SAS software to determine the proportion of older adults with selected characteristics.

What was learned as a result of this work?

- **Many older adults in New Hampshire are not getting the dental care they need**

Among the older adults screened as part of this project who were dentate (with teeth), 43% had untreated decay, 30% had root fragments, 12% had obvious teeth mobility, 8% had gingivitis, and 16% were in need of periodontal care. Among all who were assessed, 45% are in need of dental care, 33% need early dental care (within the next three months) and 12% have urgent dental needs.

- **Nearly one in five older adults screened as part of this project do not have any natural teeth**

Findings from this project indicate that 16% of the older adults assessed in senior centers and congregate meal sites were edentulous (without teeth). Complete tooth loss not only impairs the ability to chew efficiently and effectively, it also impacts speech, social interaction, food choice and can detract from one's physical appearance, leading to lower self esteem. Individuals with extensive or complete tooth loss are more likely to eat easier to chew foods such as those rich in saturated fats and cholesterol, rather than those high in nutrients and fiber.

- **Less than 10% percent of the older adults screened for this project report having dental insurance**

A primary indicator of access to dental care in the U.S. is dental insurance. Studies have shown that persons with dental insurance have more dental visits than persons without dental insurance.

- **Less than half of the older adults screened for this project report not having a dental home**

Only 43% of the older adults screened as part of this project reported having a regular dentist or dental clinic that they used for dental care.



For additional information about NACDD Oral Health Opportunity Grants, contact Carol McPhillips-Tangum, MPH, NACDD Healthy Aging Consultant at ctangum@chronicdisease.org