

Policy

Update on Oral Health Policy and Legislation

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One of the most exciting pieces of legislation to come out of the WV Legislature in 2002 was the passage of the Oral Health Improvement Act. The Act created a state oral health program within the Bureau for Public Health. It required a dentist be appointed as director, to administer the program. It identified the following goals and objectives for the state's dental health program:

- Develop a comprehensive dental health plan.
- Provide the consultation necessary to coordinate federal, state, county and city agency programs concerning dental health.
- Encourage, support and augment efforts of local boards of health and boards of education in the implementation of a dental health component in their program plans.
- Provide consultation and program information to, at a minimum, health professionals, health professional education institutions, school educators, extension specialists and volunteer agencies.
- Provide programs aimed at preventing and detecting oral cancer in the state with a primary focus of meeting the needs of high-risk under-served populations, with the intent to reduce oral cancer mortality.
- Provide programs addressing oral health education, and promotion.

Unfortunately, almost immediately after passage, the state

began to experience the growing budget difficulties we are facing today, starting with the \$90 million dollar TANF shortfall. As a result, just one month under a year, we still do not have a dental director.

The Oral Health Task Force has been active in its' efforts to support the hiring of a dental director and the creation of a state oral health program. During the last year the Task Force, with support from the WV Community Voices Partnership, submitted a proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for a Statewide Oral Health Program that would have provided financial support to the new position and staff. Unfortunately, the proposal was not funded.

The Task Force participated in the planning and implementation of a Rural Health Policy Institute for Oral Health that was held on January 22, 2003. The event, co-sponsored by the Center for Rural Health Development, Inc. and WV Community Voices Partnership, was intended to keep oral health in the minds of West Virginia's legislators. Dr. Richard Meckstroth, Chairman of the Oral Health Policy Task Force, and of the Department of Rural and Community Dentistry at the School Dentistry, provided an overview on the state of oral health in West Virginia. Ms. Shelly Gehshan, Program Director for the National Conference of State Legislatures, provided an overview of public policy approaches taken by other states to address oral health problems. Ms. Betty Knighton, Director of West Virginia Center for Civic Life, facilitated audience discussion around strategies to address the workforce shortage or maldistribution problem and strategies to increase access to oral health care in the state. A written report on the event will be available in April or May 2003 and will be available on the WV Community Voices website www.wvcommunityvoices.org.

Coming Attractions

February 21: "Give Kids a Smile" is a national event sponsored by the American Dental Association. Dental Societies and State Dental Associations will be conducting a variety of programs throughout the month of February, which is traditionally dental health month. Keep an eye open for activities in your area. *For more information contact the dental society in your county or check the WVDA website, www.wvda.org*

March 8: The Kanawha Community Health Improvement Initiative and Advantage Valley are sponsoring health fairs at the Huntington Mall, the Town Center Mall in Charleston, and the Ashland Mall in Ashland, Kentucky. Dental professionals will have a table at each of these events, providing educational materials, and answering questions. *For more information about the Health Fairs contact Judy Crabtree at judy.crabtree@camc.org.*

- Over 70 percent of West Virginia's children have some form of dental insurance.
- The predominant insurer of pediatric oral health is Medicaid, followed by CHIP.
- In fiscal year 2001 only 43% of children in the Medicaid program received dental care.
- By the time West Virginia's children see the dentist, when they are school age or older, they already have dental caries. According to WV HP2010, 65.6 percent of children have cavities by age 8.
- Finance is only one barrier to oral health care for children. Seventy-five percent of dentists accept Medicaid and CHIP. Of that number, 25 percent are not accepting new patients. 36% of dentists do not see children younger than age 3.

Let Us Hear From You

This is the first of what we hope will be many newsletters on oral health in West Virginia. Please pass this newsletter along to friends, family, or colleagues who you think would find it of interest.

Also, please let us know about any other oral health activities, programs, policies, within or outside of West Virginia feel more people should know about.

If you are receiving this newsletter from a colleague and want to receive directly just let me know at: gbellamy@hsc.wvu.edu.

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Service

Oral Health Care for our Youngest Children

The Pediatric Preventive Oral Health Project (PPOHP) began as a collaborative effort between the West Virginia Institute for Health Policy Research and the School of Dentistry at West Virginia University's Health Science Center. Originally funded by the Office of Rural Health Policy, in the Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, the goal of the PPOHP is to improve the oral health care of very young children, from birth through age three.

The project employs three strategies to achieve its goal:

- Address the issue of financēby working through community health centers around the state.
- Address barriers to care by linking oral health screening and education to well-child visits.
- Address shortages of oral health professionals by training non-dental providers (physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants) to provide anticipatory guidance to parents/guardians of young children, assess risk for dental caries by providing early dental screenings, and refer high risk children six months and older to the dentist for application of fluoride varnish and all other children by age one for a baseline exam.

The dental director for the project is Dr. Dan Brody, director of dentistry for Valley Health Systems, a federally funded Community Health Center with multiple sites. Sally K. Richardson, Executive Director of the WV Institute for Health Policy Research was the project director for the HRSA funded effort. The program originally began as a demonstration project in 2001.

The first year was focused on the development of training materials for use with providers, identification of oral health education materials for use with parents, and the development of an oral health checklist that guides the providers through each visit including assessment of risk and appropriate anticipatory guidance.

The second year, 2002, was spent field-testing and fine-tuning the training, the educational materials, and the process in five centers around the state. Additional funding for the field test in two of the five counties and for the support of a project website (in development) was provided by the 21st Century Challenge Fund of the Southern Rural Access Project, RWJF and the Sisters of Saint Joseph Charitable Fund.

The project is currently being expanded to centers around the state with funding from the West Virginia Primary Care Association, through a grant it received from the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. A Pediatric Oral Health Advisory Group, formed to advise and guide the expansion, includes the active membership of the West Virginia Dental Association. The WVDA has committed to identifying dentists willing to see children referred to them by age one and to handle the fluoride varnish

For more information on the program, and for participating primary care centers near you, contact Ms. Bobbi Jo Muto at bjmuto@vhs-wv.org