

STATE ORAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR DISADVANTAGED PERSONS

Recommendation Report with Strategies

The past half-century has seen the meaning of oral health evolve from a narrow focus on teeth and gums to the recognition that the mouth is the center of vital tissues and functions that are critical to total health and well-being across the life span. But the evidence that not all Americans have achieved the same level of oral health and well-being stands as a major challenge - a challenge that demands the combined efforts of public and private agencies and individuals.

Oral and craniofacial health issues will continue to be diverse and complex. In this context, the need and demand for oral and craniofacial health services and the role, functions, and mix of health professionals need to be addressed. Need and demand will continue to be the drivers of the health service requirements of our society. Additionally, major changes in demography, patterns of disease, and management of health care will continue to shape the roles and functions of health professionals. These conditions will necessitate interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to care. Coordination of professional care with that of individuals, caregivers, and the community will be needed to control costs, ensure optimal care, and reduce disparities in access and utilization.

A comprehensive state oral health plan developed through a broad-based collaborative process that provides direction for the continued development of an integrated, coordinated oral health system between the public and private sectors is vitally needed as a foundation for a unified effort. A state plan will help ensure that appropriate population-based prevention and educational programs exist; that appropriate surveillance systems are present to monitor the status of oral diseases; and that all Floridians have access to oral health care services and can acquire the oral health literacy necessary to make use of oral and craniofacial health promotion and disease prevention information and activities. All Floridians can benefit from the development of a state oral health plan to improve quality of life and eliminate health disparities by facilitating collaborations among individuals, health care providers, communities, and policymakers at all levels of society and by taking advantage of existing initiatives.

The vision of Florida's State Oral Health Improvement Plan (SOHIP) is to advance the general health and well-being of all Floridians by creating critical partnerships at all levels of society that engage in programs to promote oral health and prevent oral diseases. With this in mind a broad-based team of partners representing interests throughout health care were enlisted to form the SOHIP team. The resulting team was charged with enumerating initiatives to enhance oral health, with an emphasis on those related to the 2000 Surgeon General's Report¹ and to the *Healthy People 2010*^{2,3} oral health objectives, and to expand these efforts by enlisting the expertise of individuals, health care providers, communities, and policymakers at all levels of society. The SOHIP team was charged with developing a State Oral Health Plan that includes a State Action Plan - a formal plan with goals, implementation steps, strong evaluation components, and monitoring plans with realistic timelines, guidelines, and budgets. The State Action Plan will serve as a blueprint for enlisting collaborators and partners and attracting funding sources to ensure sustainability.

As part of Florida's State Oral Health Improvement Plan, the SOHIP team adopted seven broad recommendations with associated strategies in order to guide the development of an action plan. The proposed recommendations reflect ideas and approaches outlined in the 2000 Surgeon General's Report¹ and Florida's State Oral Health Improvement Plan. Each of the seven broad recommendations required responses from individuals and groups who are most concerned with this aspect of oral and general health and are in a position to act - whether as community leaders, volunteers, health care professionals, research investigators, policymakers, and other concerned parties, or as public and private agencies able to bring their organizational mandates and strengths to the issues. The groups and individuals responding need to work as partners, sharing ideas and coordinating activities to capitalize on joint resources and expertise to achieve common goals.

Broad Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Improve access to community and school-based prevention programs for all ages.

Safe and effective measures exist to prevent the most common dental diseases – tooth decay and gum diseases. Appropriate use of fluorides and sealants, good personal oral hygiene practices including brushing and flossing and proper diet and nutrition, and regular professional examinations and care can prevent many dental diseases and improve overall health and well-being. Professional and individual measures, including the use of fluoride mouthrinses, gels, dentifrices, and dietary supplements and the application of dental sealants, have the ability to limit and potentially eliminate tooth decay in children. Moreover, fluoridation benefits all residents regardless of their social or economic status. Community water fluoridation is a proven safe and effective measure that prevents tooth decay in both children and adults. Enhanced community and school-based preventive programs can cost effectively decrease oral health disease burdens throughout the state.

Strategies:

1. Increase access to fluoridation.
2. Advocate for improved diet and nutrition in schools.
3. Expand school-based and school-linked dental sealant programs.
4. Expand school-based fluoride mouthrinse programs.
5. Develop school-based fluoride varnish programs.

Recommendation 2: Improve access to community and school-based education programs for children and adults.

Many people consider oral diseases to be less important than most systemic diseases and illnesses. As a result, many people avoid or postpone needed oral health care. Opportunities exist to expand the public's understanding of the meaning of good oral health, optimal oral health care, and the relationship of oral health to general health through community and school-based programs.

Strategies:

1. Enlist support from and train school health providers and educators on oral health issues.
2. Provide appropriate grade-level oral health education curricula in both public and private schools.
3. Provide community-based oral health education presentations at school fairs, community centers, community events, nursing homes, and faith-based centers.
4. Advocate for increased funding for community and school-based oral health education programs.

Recommendation 3: Increase public and governmental awareness of oral health issues.

Raising awareness of oral health among the public, health care providers, and legislators and public officials at all levels of government is essential to creating effective public policy to improve Florida's oral health. For this to happen, the public, health professionals, and policymakers must understand that oral health is essential to general health and well-being at every stage of life.

Strategies:

1. Educate lawmakers and policymakers about the importance of oral health.
2. Educate the public about the importance of oral health and the connection between oral health and general health
3. Educate non-dental health care providers on the importance of oral health.
4. Conduct specific work groups, forums, or summits to develop strategies, objectives, and action steps for specific disadvantaged population groups.
5. Utilize Internet resources for oral health information and education.

Recommendation 4: Improve state and county-based oral health data collection and research.

Basic behavioral and biomedical research, clinical trials, and population-based research and surveillance data have been at the heart of scientific advances over the past decades. Research and surveillance data provide critical knowledge about oral and general health, community needs and success or failure of programs and initiatives. Data is essential to policymakers in order to make informed decisions regarding funding and programs.

Strategies:

1. Develop an outcome/disease-based data collection system and develop and maintain state and county-specific profiles.
2. Develop a systematic, annual analysis of the Medicaid and KidCare programs.
3. Advocate for a statewide oral health research agenda.

Recommendation 5: Improve access to care by assuring a highly trained, diverse, appropriately allocated dental workforce.

The distribution (and possibly numbers) of oral health providers does not coincide with the geographic distribution of Florida's citizens. Additionally, the racial and ethnic composition of

oral health providers does not reflect the demographic makeup of Florida's population. There are too few oral health care providers who are adequately trained to provide services to very young children and special needs populations. There is also a shortfall in the numbers of men and women choosing careers in oral health education and research. These factors contribute to the disparities in access to and utilization of oral health care services.

Strategies:

1. Assure that an adequate number of appropriate dental care provider types exist and increase the diversity of dental care providers.
2. Expand professional training opportunities regarding care for special needs populations.
3. Expand volunteer incentives.
4. Consider reforms to better utilize the existing dental workforce to achieve improved access to care.

Recommendation 6: Improve access to care by assuring adequate statewide, publicly focused infrastructure and support programs.

Gaps in oral health care primarily affect Florida's most vulnerable populations. Currently most of these vulnerable children are covered through the KidCare Program, which offers fairly comprehensive dental benefits. However, the percentage of children that receive an annual dental checkup/visit through the various components of the KidCare Program remains low. Only a small percent of vulnerable adults are covered by the Medicaid Program, which only offers minimal benefits. An enhanced, more efficient and effective publicly focused infrastructure would facilitate increased access to dental care throughout the State.

Strategies:

1. Promote improvement of the Medicaid Dental program.
2. Expand community-based safety-net fixed clinics and mobile units.
3. Promote school oral health screenings at periodic intervals with appropriate referrals.
4. Improve dental services through the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).
5. Expand centers that specialize in care for special needs populations.
6. Promote continuity of care through targeted case management and patient education.
7. Establish a county-specific, statewide resource guide of dental care programs that provide care for disadvantaged populations.
8. Develop resources to facilitate organizations applying for grants.
9. Advocate for better compensation for safety-net dental providers to improve quantity and quality of providers.
10. Explore teledentistry opportunities to increase access to care for underserved populations.
11. Co-locate dental services with other health care services.

Recommendation 7: Improve the integration of oral health prevention and education into general health.

All health care providers can and should contribute to enhancing oral health. However, little time is devoted to oral health and disease topics in the education of non-dental health professionals.

The 2000 Surgeon General's Report¹ and the Surgeon General's *National Call to Action*⁴ emphasized that oral health plans should be developed with the intent of incorporating them into existing general health plans. "While a detailed plan is necessary to guide collaboration on the many specific actions necessary for enhancing oral health, integration of key components into the state's general health plan will assure that oral health is included where appropriate in other state health initiatives."⁴ Florida's *State Oral Health Improvement Plan* urges that oral health promotion, disease prevention, and oral health care have a presence in all health policy agendas set at local and state levels. Building this plan into existing health programs will maximize the integration of oral health into general health programs—not only by incorporating the expertise of multidisciplinary professional teams, but also allowing the plan to benefit from economies of scale by adding on to existing facilities, utilizing existing data and management systems, and serving the public at locations already known to patients.

Strategies:

1. Develop protocols to integrate oral health into all appropriate DOH programs.
2. Utilize existing community networks to identify patients with systemic diseases that relate to oral health.
3. Advocate for oral health screenings to become a standard of care in medical examinations.
4. Advocate for increased oral health training for medical professionals.

References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research; 2000.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. 2 vols.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; 2000.
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health. 2nd ed.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; November 2000.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research; 2003. NIH Publication No. 03-5303.