

Successful Partnerships to Improve Oral Health in Head Start

Contact Information

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Program Information N/A

Partnership Information

A state oral health planning committee was formed before the Head Start oral health forum held in 2004, and the committee is still in existence. Committee members include West Virginia Head Start Association staff, Region III technical assistance staff, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources oral health program director, the West Virginia Head Start Collaboration Office director, the director of child and adolescent health, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources' Division of Early Care and Education director, Valley Health Systems staff, West Virginia Oral Health Task Force staff, Head Start Grantee health managers, West Virginia University School of Dentistry staff, and community-based health professionals.

Committee members assisted several Early Head Start and Head Start programs in the state in applying for the National Head Start Oral Health grant. Members partnered with local Head Start programs throughout the state to help them develop their applications. Although no grant was awarded to a West Virginia grantee, the process brought together professionals from the oral health and Head Start communities and improved communication and understanding. This experience also highlighted the need for collaboration to improve the oral health of children in West Virginia.

Oral Health Activity

Education

Activity Description

The committee developed a grant proposal, and the proposed project was funded by the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, a philanthropic organization that directs its resources to West Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania. The grant was awarded to the West Virginia Head Start Association to carry on with the work identified during the Head Start oral health forum held in 2004. Funding for this 2-year grant totals \$225,000.

The primary focus of grant activities is to provide education to Head Start staff and parents in an effort to reduce the occurrence of dental caries in children, reduce the incidence of missed dental appointments, and improve families' overall oral health. A mini-grant-awarding process that will be open to Head Start grantees across the state will be used to encourage the development of creative methods to address these concerns at the local level. A collateral benefit of the formation of the oral health committee is the joint work that has been accomplished to address oral health problems among young children. Head Start programs and dentists have entered into a dialogue characterized by mutual respect and are sharing ideas to address concerns.

Target Population of the Project

- Staff of the 23 Head Start grantees in all 55 West Virginia counties
- Parents or guardians of the 7,850 children who participate in Head Start in West Virginia

Expected Outcomes

- Head Start staff and parents of children enrolled in Head Start, as well as pregnant women enrolled in Early Head Start, will have increased awareness of the importance of oral health to good overall health.
- Parents will have increased knowledge of how to care for the oral health of their children.
- Parents of children enrolled in Head Start will have received information on prevention of oral disease.
- West Virginia Early Head Start and Head Start programs will apply for mini grants to provide a training program for early intervention and risk assessment.
- Early Head Start and Head Start staff and other child care workers and early childhood education professionals will have increased access to oral health resources.
- The number of missed dental appointments will fall.
- Train-the-trainer workshops will be made available to Early Head Start and Head Start staff to increase awareness of preventive measures and oral health risk assessment.
- Scientifically sound, developmentally and culturally appropriate health-education materials will be disseminated.