

Successful Partnerships to Improve Oral Health in Head Start

Contact Information

Program title: Humboldt County Dental Collaborative

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Funded enrollment: Approximately 138 Early Head Start and 544 Head Start

Program Information

Type of Program

Early Head Start and Head Start

Location of Program

Combination or other program option

Partnership Information

The Humboldt Dental Collaborative is highly engaged network of health and oral health professionals, local foundations, nonprofit agencies, government agencies, schools, and Head Start programs dedicated to systemic changes to break the cycle of oral disease in children. The oral health coordinator provides overarching direction on these collaborative activities.

Northcoast Children's Services is the local Head Start agency. The California Conservation Corps Teaching Oral Optimism Throughout Humboldt (TOOTH) AmeriCorps program provides primary oral health education and evaluation in Humboldt County. Although these three agencies are only a part of the Humboldt Dental Collaborative, they will be highlighted in this summary.

Oral Health Activity

Education

Disease prevention

Service delivery

Activity Description

Within the context of a comprehensive prevention matrix, Northcoast Children's Services and Head Start have developed unique collaborative partnerships to provide oral health services that extend beyond what any one agency can provide, as follows:

Education: The TOOTH program provides 11 modules on oral health, nutrition, and oral hygiene to staff and parents at Early Head Start and Head Start centers. TOOTH program goals are to provide—in partnership with parents—oral health services and preventive education, stimulate the development of community resources, and encourage community participation in advocating

for prevention of oral disease. Based on pre- and post-testing, the TOOTH program results in consistent and significant improvement in children's oral health knowledge and brushing dexterity, decreased plaque levels, and improved brushing time.

Prevention: The public health branch and local community medical and dental clinics are establishing the well child visit, which comprises early comprehensive preventive oral health care for young children. The visit includes parent education, oral assessment, oral hygiene, and fluoride varnish starting by age 1. Children enrolled in Head Start are the primary recipients of these services.

Service delivery: Northcoast Children's Services/Head Start is collecting oral-disease-severity data that can be compared over time by region, by access to oral health services, and by frequency of the well child dental visit. The California Center for Rural Policy at Humboldt State University is planning to perform sociospatial evaluation of this data. This will identify geographic areas lacking oral health services and the impact of this lack on the oral health status of children enrolled in Head Start.