

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Project Title Perinatal and Infant Oral Health Quality Improvement Expansion

Applicant Organization Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment,
Oral Health Program, Cavity Free at Three

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Pregnancy and early childhood are pivotal times for families in finding a dental home, establishing habits for good oral health, and accessing regular oral health care throughout the lifespan. Pregnant women and infants, especially in low-income populations, have lower rates of utilization for recommended oral health care than the population as a whole. This disparity often results in dental disease. Connecting pregnant women and their infants to oral health services through primary care providers is a promising practice for reaching low-income populations, since these individuals are more likely to access primary care than dental care.

Multiple factors influence the lack of oral health care and disease prevention among pregnant women and young children. Populations most at risk for oral health problems often have limited or no access to a dental provider because of financial or geographic factors. These at-risk populations also may have limited understanding of the importance of oral health and limited skills for oral health self-care. In addition, dental providers are often hesitant to treat pregnant women and infants. This can be attributable to a lack of understanding of the importance of oral health care for these groups as well as fears about liability and safety. Furthermore, many dental and medical providers do not have the cultural and linguistic competence to meet the needs of Hispanic patients, a population at higher risk for oral health problems in Colorado.

To address these multiple factors, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment proposes a plan that includes the following strategies: (1) increase the knowledge and skills of the primary care workforce, in multiple locations and settings, to assess oral health risks, provide basic oral health education, apply fluoride varnish, and make a referral to a dentist; (2) increase the cultural competence of primary care and dental professionals to meet the oral health needs of Hispanic patients; (3) reduce apprehension among providers about providing oral health care for pregnant women and infants; (4) craft relevant messages about good oral health to the intended populations; (5) create and support policies that improve access to oral health care; and (6) use new and existing data sources, both population-based and claims-based, to inform work in real time. This plan will be implemented by the Oral Health Program's Cavity Free at Three initiative.

The impact of this work will be evaluated through various performance metrics. Program adjustments will be made using a rapid improvement cycle, which will facilitate continuous improvement of results.