

Preventive Oral Health Care Integration in Texas Initiative (POHCIT)

POHCIT is one of eight Maternal and Child Health—Improving Oral Health Integration projects funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to advance the integration of preventive oral health care (POHC) into primary care to make POHC more accessible to infants, children, adolescents, and pregnant women, including those with special health care needs, who are at risk for poor oral health.

POHCIT is implementing a two-tier, state- and local-level approach to improve access to oral health care for their target population—pregnant women receiving care at participating community health centers (CHCs).

Partners

POHCIT is led by the Texas Department of State Health Services (TX DSHS), Oral Health Improvement Program (OHIP), in collaboration with the University of Texas Health San Antonio School of Dentistry, the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, and the Texas Association of Community Health Centers. The POHCIT Alliance provides guidance and recommendations to the project team and includes representatives from state public health and education organizations, the state Medicaid program, medical and dental provider associations, and health plans.

State-Level Approach

POHCIT's state-level approach aims to advance three core functions (policy and practice; outreach and education; and data, analysis, and evaluation) to promote integrated POHC for its target population.

Core Function Activities

Policy and Practice

POHCIT completed an environmental scan to gain knowledge about factors that could impact the integration of oral health care into primary care for pregnant women in Texas. The scan included



questions focused on medical providers' and dental providers' scope of practice, Medicaid billing and payment, and policies and regulations. Selected findings include:

- Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and certified or registered medical assistants can apply fluoride varnish directly or through delegation by a dentist but cannot perform a caries risk assessment or apply silver diamine fluoride (SDF) in Texas.
- Dental hygienists can work in medical settings under the general supervision of a dentist in Texas. Dental hygienists may provide services in schools, nursing facilities, and community health centers



for up to 6 months before a dentist is required to see the patient.

- The Texas Medicaid dental benefit for pregnant women ages 21 and older is limited to emergency services for the relief of pain and infection. Some managed care plans provide oral health services through a value-added benefit.
- The Texas Medicaid program does not reimburse medical providers for oral health services provided to pregnant women ages 21 and older.
- Texas has a certification process for community health workers (CHWs) and a CHW curriculum that includes oral health.

POHCIT used the *Capacity Inventory for Integrating Oral Health Care into Primary Care for Pregnant Women: Tool* to identify policy and practice improvement opportunities. The team selected four policy and practice strategies to address during the 4-year project period to improve access to oral health care for the target population:

- Establish reimbursement by the Texas Medicaid program for medical providers who apply fluoride varnish to the teeth of pregnant women ages 21 and older.
- Increase the dollar amount cap for oral health care available to pregnant women ages 21 and older as part of the value-added benefit of certain managed care plans.
- Establish reimbursement by the Texas Title V Maternal and Child Health Fee-for-Service (TVFFS) program for medical providers who apply fluoride varnish to the teeth of pregnant women ages 21 and older.
- Establish reimbursement by the TVFFS program for dentists who apply SDF to the teeth of pregnant women ages 21 and older. The TVFFS program approved and adopted this improvement in October 2024. POHCIT Alliance members will work to increase awareness and use of SDF application among TVFFS-contracted dental clinics.

Education and Outreach

POHCIT is collaborating with Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso to incorporate oral health into the medical school curriculum using asynchronous modules, case studies, and other resources that will be made available to all medical schools in Texas. In addition, POHCIT is collaborating with the Texas Association of Community Health Centers to assess oral health knowledge and skills among medical providers in their member CHCs and to develop an oral health literacy plan to address identified knowledge gaps. In project year 4, POHCIT, in collaboration with the University of Texas Health San Antonio School of Dentistry, will host a one-day symposium for all stakeholders to share project accomplishments and teach others how to integrate oral health care into primary care for pregnant women.

Data, Analysis, and Evaluation

POHCIT is working with the Texas Department of State Health Services, Center for Health Statistics, to make oral health surveillance data more accessible through an oral health dashboard. The dashboard will include data from the Texas Basic Screening Survey, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System.



POHCIT is also working with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Office of Data Analytics and Performance, and the Texas Medicaid dental director to regularly acquire and evaluate Medicaid claims data and utilization rates for oral health care.

Local-Level Approach

POHCIT is working with three CHCs to integrate POHC into prenatal care. POHCIT's local-level approach incorporates activities in three core function areas: policy and practice; outreach and education; and data, analysis, and evaluation.

Core Function Activities

Policy and Practice

POHCIT recruited and onboarded three CHC clinics. POHCIT improved its onboarding and implementation processes to make it easier for clinics to get started (e.g., providing a menu of options for clinics to consider as they decide how to improve pregnant women's oral health literacy, finding and vetting resources for clinics to share with patients, creating a medical-dental integration page on the TX

DSHS, OHIP, website to be a resource for clinics). POHCIT meets regularly with each site to support the implementation of its model of care and to monitor progress.

Education and Outreach

POHCIT is conducting an oral health literacy knowledge and skills assessment of medical providers in participating clinics. POHCIT is also evaluating dental providers' knowledge of prenatal oral health in participating clinics. Results will inform training plans for each clinic. In addition, POHCIT is conducting oral health literacy gaps analyses of pregnant women in the participating clinics. Results will guide the development of anticipatory guidance and educational materials for pregnant women.

Data, Analysis, and Evaluation

POHCIT is providing technical assistance (TA) to each clinic to help it document the provision of POHC; collect, analyze, and evaluate data; and identify areas for improvement. POHCIT prepared educational materials and readiness tools for the clinics to use for clinical data collection and analysis.

Early Successes/Lessons Learned

- POHCIT received support from the TVFFS program and successfully established reimbursement for dental providers who apply SDF to pregnant women's teeth.

Early Challenges

- POHCIT experienced lower than anticipated completion rates for the oral health knowledge and skills assessments and training modules for medical providers and dental providers at one clinic. POHCIT adjusted the timeline for completing these activities and provided training support during TA calls to increase completion rates. This experience informed POHCIT's timeline for onboarding other clinics.

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