

Oral Health Environmental Scan 2021

Executive Summary

Oral health is an essential component of overall health and well-being at every stage of life, particularly during early childhood, when many families establish health-related habits. However, due to access gaps nearly one in four US children 2-5 years of age experience dental caries on their primary teeth, and dental caries remain predominantly prevalent among children living with limited family resources. The goal of the TOHF project is to improve the oral health of children 0–40 months through the integration of preventive oral health services into primary care settings in community health centers in Virginia, New York, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Medical-dental integration, also known as interprofessional practice, integrates and coordinates dental care into primary care and behavioral health, increasing opportunity to access oral health services and supporting individual and population health for better patient outcomes. This scan is specifically designed to identify areas of opportunity to advance medical-dental integration.

Oral Health Services in Virginia

Children enrolled in Virginia's Medicaid program receive comprehensive oral health coverage, including fluoride varnish applications by a medical or dental provider every six months until their 3rd birthday. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends applications through age 5, two more years of fluoride varnish applications than Virginia's primary care clinicians are currently applying.

Since 2015, pregnant people in Virginia's Medicaid program have received comprehensive dental coverage, including fillings, gum-related treatment, and dentures. Despite available dental coverage, utilization of dental services in Medicaid is not as high as it could be; see Figures 1 and 2.

Note: COVID-19 responses impacted the availability of dental appointments and capacity of dental staff, resulting in lower dental utilization rate in FY2020.

Oral Health Scopes of Practice

⇐ Dental hygienists can practice under remote supervision by a dentist with regular communication about patient care. They can practice with the Virginia Dept. of Health mobile dentistry programs, through a dental safety net clinic (FQHC, free clinic), Head Start, WIC, school, or long-term care facility.

Figure 1:

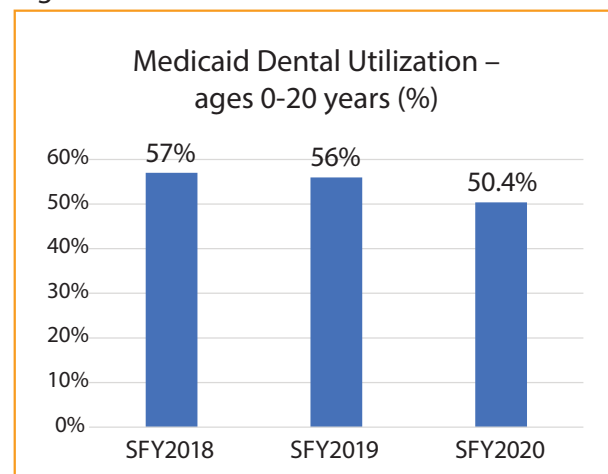
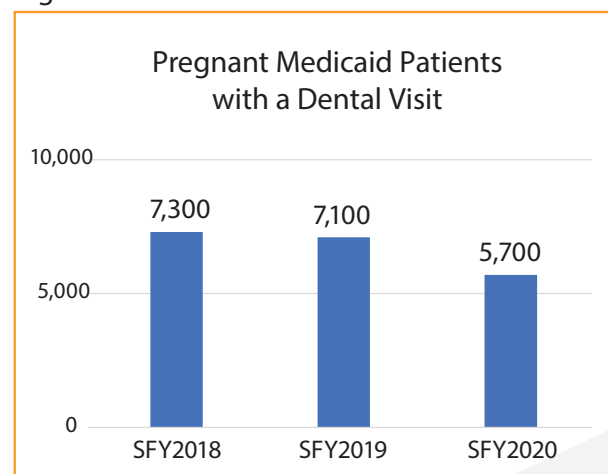


Figure 2:



- ↔ Community health workers (CHWs) can be certified in Virginia, certification curriculum includes oral health. Oral health services performed by CHWs aren't reimbursable by Medicaid.
- ↔ Medical assistants can apply fluoride varnish in Virginia.

Teledentistry

- ↔ The COVID-19 pandemic propelled Virginia's use of teledentistry. Dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants can use teledentistry.
- ↔ Teledentistry can offer innovative solutions to continuing patient care, delivering patient education, triaging emergent cases, and providing patient referrals.
- ↔ As of July 2021, Virginia Medicaid continues to reimburse for asynchronous and synchronous teledentistry services.

Future Strategies

The current policy environment favors actions to improve access to healthcare. There are opportunities to meet the TOHF goals through:

- ↔ Working with health centers to ensure that all providers are operating at the top of their scopes of practice.
- ↔ Embedding CHWs into dental care teams and creating sustainable funding mechanisms to support this work.
- ↔ Partnering with state agencies to support and promote the use of teledentistry, especially regarding remote supervision follow-up appointments from referrals.
- ↔ Promoting the use of and participation in the Medicaid adult dental benefit among Virginia FQHCs. Research shows children may be more likely to receive dental care if their caregivers offer dental coverage.¹

¹ Lipton B. J. (2021). Adult Medicaid benefit generosity and receipt of recommended health services among low-income children: The spillover effects of Medicaid adult dental coverage expansions. *Journal of health economics*, 75, 102404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2020.102404>

Resources

- [Annual Report: Smiles For Children FY 2020](#)
- [CDC: 2018 State Fluoridation Statistics](#)
- [Virginia Dental Association: Remote Supervision Overview and Guidance](#)
- [Smiles For Children: Member Handbook](#)

State Project Staff

- Sarah Holland, CEO
Virginia Health Catalyst
sholland@vahealthcatalyst.org
- Erica Facetti, VP of Programs
Virginia Health Catalyst
efacetti@vahealthcatalyst.org
- Kimberly Lewis, Program Director
Virginia Health Catalyst
klewis@vahealthcatalyst.org



TOHF Project Staff

- Rachel King
TOHF Project Director, HealthEfficient
rking@healthefficient.org
- Victoria Potter
Program Manager, HealthEfficient
vpotter@healthefficient.org

NOHI Project

To learn more about the NOHI project, please visit www.mchoralhealth.org/pdfs/nohi-overview-profiles.pdf

Disclaimer

This environmental scan was conducted and summarized by HealthEfficient and Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy staff. This publication was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of cooperative agreement number UK7MC33231. This information or content and conclusions are those of TOHF project staff and should not be construed as the official policy of HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. government, nor should any endorsements be inferred.

Publication date: 2022