



Maine CDC Oral Health Program Annual Report

Calendar Year 2023

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Required by:
22 MRS §3174-S, recently amended by
Public Law 2021, chapter 635

Prepared by:
Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Division of Disease Prevention, Oral Health Program

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oral health problems affect our ability to eat certain foods, the way we communicate, how we view ourselves, and how others perceive us. A major theme of the Surgeon General’s 2000 Report¹ “Oral Health in America” is that oral health means much more than healthy teeth and gums, it means being free from oral pain, oral cancers, birth defects, and other diseases or problems that affect our daily functioning. Tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease, occurring five to eight times as frequently as asthma. It reports that children who experience tooth decay, abscesses, and chronic dental pain are more frequently absent from school, with more than 51 million school hours lost each year to dental related illness. Students often cannot concentrate on, nor excel in, their schoolwork and are unable to actively participate in their learning environments.

There are many barriers to dental care that cause children to needlessly suffer from preventable dental disease. Barriers include cost, lack of transportation, lack of knowledge about the importance of preventive care, language and cultural differences, and fear. School-based oral health programs are one way to overcome these obstacles and ensure equitable access to oral health services for all children. In taking steps to eliminate the oral health disparities currently seen across the State, it is important to include pediatric and family physicians, school health providers, and parents/caregivers. Collaborative, community-based oral health promotion programs are also vital to improving the oral health of children in Maine.

The Maine School Oral Health Program (Program) is part of the core work of the Oral Health Program within the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC), Division of Disease Prevention, an office of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (Department). School-based oral health education has been supported by the Department since the mid-1970s. The Program provides a range of services including oral health education, oral health assessment and screening, fluoride treatments, dental sealants, and assistance with care coordination to a dental home. The program’s purpose is to improve the health of Maine’s citizens by promoting oral health and preventing dental disease in children. Maine has mandatory school health education, and the Program has strongly supported the inclusion of oral health in this initiative.

The Program has evolved since its inception in the 1970s. At first, school personnel were responsible for administering the weekly fluoride mouth rinse and conducting oral health educational programming. Eventually, school nurses were trained to conduct a basic oral health screening and apply fluoride varnish, which was completed twice per year. In 2017, under the direction of the Rural Health and Primary Care Program, the Program sought to increase consistency and to reduce the burden placed on school nurses. Public health field hygienists were employed to conduct oral health screenings, apply fluoride varnish applications and sealants, when applicable, and collect and report data to the Maine CDC.

A primary objective of Maine’s oral health laws has been to ensure that children in all regions of the State who are enrolled in the Medicaid program have access to dental care (22 MRSA §3174-S, sub-§3). The Legislature appropriated funds (P.L. 2021 c. 635, part AAA.) to expand school-

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/federal-agency-reports/sgr2000_05.htm

based oral health services provided through the Program to all schools in Maine and for children to receive at least one preventive dental visit annually. Per MaineCare’s dental metrics reporting, about 37.5% of MaineCare-enrolled children are receiving at least one preventive dental visit annually².

Pursuant to the recent expansion, the Program is to, on a rolling basis, expand its preventive oral services to all schools by January 1, 2025, and report annually Program progress. Additionally, the Department is to report methods for maximizing Medicaid funding as it relates to school-based preventive oral health services.

To accomplish this expansion, the law funds an Oral Health Coordinator position within the Maine CDC to lead public health functions specific to oral health. Program funds are used to cover the cost of oral health services conducted in schools and for expanding these school-based services.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Maine CDC’s Oral Health Program has prepared this report which includes the status of oral health program services in Maine schools and the number of additional schools enrolled in the Program. (22 MRSA §3174-S, sub-§4.)

Program Accomplishments

Since July 1, 2022, 66 new schools have been added to the Maine School Oral Health Program in 13 counties: Aroostook, Androscoggin, Cumberland, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Penobscot, Somerset, Waldo, Washington, and York. For a complete list of new schools, see Attachment A.

As of April 2023, the newly reinstated Health Program Manager position for the Oral Health Program has been filled. The hiring and onboarding of this position is made possible with the funding allocated in P.L. 2021, chapter 635.

The Program has collaborated with the Office of MaineCare Services through active participation on the Oral Health subcommittee of the MaineCare Advisory Committee. The Program has also undertaken a review of possible methods for maximizing private insurance and MaineCare billing for eligible children to maximize the impact of State General Funds allocated to the School Oral Health Program, while considering barriers for said billing to work toward access for all children, regardless of payer source.

Program Challenges

The Oral Health Program has experienced staffing challenges, but the creation of new positions is moving forward. A new, limited-period Planning and Research Associate I position was established in January 2024. It is expected that a limited-period Public Health Educator III

² MaineCare Dental Metrics Sept 2023; https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/MaineCare_Dental_Measures_202309_1.pdf

position will also be created in early 2024. Filling these positions is necessary to support the work to expand Program capacity and reach, and steps to initiate recruitment are in process. The lack of emergency passage of the biennial budget impacted the Program's ability to access funds timely. These funds are intended to recruit oral health field consultants to conduct screenings in schools, cover the cost of service conducted in schools, and create pathways to paraprofessional certification to enhance Maine's Oral Health workforce.

Recruitment of field consultants, such as registered dental hygienists and registered nurses, to provide services to schools has also been difficult due to the decline within the already limited dental public health workforce.

The current school enrollment system requires the superintendent to make the ultimate decision for a school to participate in the School Oral Health Program. School enrollment and participation is also dependent on school administration and school nurse support. Statewide, limited school administrative capacity and superintendent dependent program enrollment has made offering school-based oral health services in every school difficult.

Program Initiatives

Oral Health Navigator Program

To address the significant oral health workforce shortage across the State, the Program is continuing to work on the development of the Oral Health Navigator Program to create entry-level jobs that would increase the public oral health workforce by hiring and training community health workers and other paraprofessionals. Utilization of the Oral Health Navigator Program will also improve data collection used to investigate the dental health of the pediatric population across the state, helping to identify areas of concern in oral health equities and disparities. Oral Health Navigators would expand the Program's workforce and enable the program to provide services to additional schools.

Independent Practice Authority for Dental Hygienists

The Program is also working toward support, guidance, and procedures to assist oral health providers in advancing their scope of practice, such as obtaining an Independent Practice Authority for a registered dental hygienist. Obtaining this authority allows a registered dental hygienist to practice in a public setting, such as a school, without the direct supervision of a dentist. This would increase the number of providers able to provide services in the school setting, further increasing the Program's reach and capacity.

Support for Schools

To increase school enrollment and participation, the Program is exploring strategies such as policy and procedural support to schools. This support would include education on the importance of oral health prevention, clarification of the types and differences of school oral health-based delivery services, and other resources to assist schools in making educated and informed decisions around school enrollment. The Program works in collaboration with Maine's Department of Education to promote participation in the Program and achieve the goal of expanding oral health services in all schools in Maine so that all children have access to preventative dental care.

ATTACHMENT A

County	SAU	School Name
Androscoggin	RSU 16	Poland Community School
	RSU 16	Bruce Whittier Middle School
	RSU 16	Elm Street School
	MSAD 52	Greene Central School
	MSAD 52	Leeds Central School
	RSU 16	Minot Consolidated School
	RSU 16	Poland Regional High School
	MSAD 52	Turner Elementary School
	MSAD 52	Turner Primary School
Cumberland	MSAD 15	Buchard Dunn Elementary School
	MSAD 15	Gray New Gloucester Middle School
	MSAD 17	Harrison Elementary
	MSAD 15	James W. Russell Elementary School
	MSAD 15	Memorial Elementary School
Hancock	Union 76	Brooklin School
	RSU 24	Charles M. Sumner School
	AOS 91	Cranberry Isles School
	Union 76	Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary
	Union 76	Deer Isle-Stonington High School
	AOS 91	Frenchboro School
	RSU 24	Peninsula School
	Union 76	Sedgwick Elementary School
	AOS 91	Swan's Island School
Kennebec	MSAD 49	Clinton Elementary
	Augusta School Dept.	Cony High School
	Augusta School Dept.	Cony Middle School
	Augusta School Dept.	Farrington School
	AOS 97	Fayette Central School
	Augusta School Dept.	Gilbert Elementary School
	RSU 2	Hall-Dale Elementary School
	RSU 2	Hall-Dale Middle School
	Augusta School Dept.	Hussey Elementary School
	MSAD 49	Lawrence High School
	Augusta School Dept.	Lincoln Elementary School
	RSU 2	Monmouth Academy
RSU 2	Monmouth Memorial	
Knox	MSAD 08	Vinalhaven School

County	SAU	School Name
Lincoln	RSU 2	Dresden Elementary School
	MSAD/RSU 40	Medomak Middle School
	MSAD/RSU 40	Medomak Valley High School
Oxford	MSAD 17	Agnes Gray School
	MSAD 17	Guy E. Rowe School
	MSAD 17	Hebron Station
	MSAD 17	Otisfield Community School
	MSAD 17	Oxford Elementary
	MSAD 17	Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School
	MSAD 17	Oxford Hills Middle School
	MSAD 17	Paris Elementary
	MSAD 55	Sacopee V. Elementary
	MSAD 55	Sacopee V. High School
	MSAD 55	Sacopee V. Middle
	MSAD 17	Waterford Memorial
Penobscot	RSU 64	Central Community Elementary School
	RSU 64	Central Middle School
	RSU 22	George B. Weatherbee School
	Glenburn Public Schools	Glenburn Elementary School
Somerset	MSAD 53	Manson Park School
	MSAD 13/ RSU 83	Moscow Elementary School
	MSAD 13/ RSU 83	Upper Kennebec Valley Jr/Sr High School
	MSAD 53	Vickery School
	MSAD 53	Warsaw School
Waldo	RSU 22	Earl C. McGraw School
	Northport Public Schools	Edna Drinkwater School
	RSU 22	Leroy Smith School
Washington	AOS 77	Lubec Consolidated School
York	Saco School Department	Gov John Fairfield School