



## A Snapshot of the Community Guide to Adult Oral Health Program Implementation

*Today in the United States, for two of every five low-income adults, poor oral health makes life less satisfying. With 43 percent suffering tooth or mouth pain, their top oral health problem is, in fact, pain. In addition, 42 percent of low-income adults have difficulty biting and chewing, which can affect eating and nutrition. Beyond challenges within the mouth, poor oral health can lead to embarrassment, anxiety, and reduced social participation: because of the condition of their teeth and mouth, one in four adults avoids smiling, while 29 percent of low-income adults say it affects their ability to interview for a job.<sup>1</sup>*

Clearly, oral health is strongly connected to overall health and quality of life, but a large gap in levels of access and availability of oral health services remains, especially among older and low-income adults. *You*, however, can make a difference in their lives! Identifying promising oral health programs from around the nation and replicating successful models is critical to improving access to care for these underserved populations.

***“Oral health is a critical component of health and must be included in the provision of health care and the design of community programs.”***

Dr. David Satcher, MD, PhD  
former Surgeon General  
of the United States

In October 2014, with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office on Women’s Health, the Administration for Community Living worked to identify and promote vetted, low-cost, community-based oral health programs for older adults. This project aimed to develop an online, searchable database of such programs and create an accompanying comprehensive Community Guide to Adult Oral Health Program Implementation (Oral Health Guide) for communities (e.g., state and local governments, coalitions, advocacy groups, senior centers) interested in starting or enhancing their own program.

The Oral Health Guide takes a step-by-step approach, with everything you need to know; a “snapshot” of eight key steps shows you how.

**Read the entire Oral Health Guide at <https://oralhealth.acl.gov>**

<sup>1</sup> American Dental Association Health Policy Institute (2015). Oral Health and Well-Being in the United States. Retrieved from <http://www.ada.org/en/science-research/health-policy-institute/oral-health-care-projects?source=VanityURL>

**According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among adults 65 and older, approximately**

- **66% suffer gum disease;**
- **20% have lost all of their teeth; and**
- **40% haven’t visited a dental professional in the past year.**



**STEP 1** Conduct  
a Needs  
Assessment

**STEP 2**  
Develop a Vision, a  
Mission, and Goals

**STEP 3**  
Establish  
Partnerships

**STEP 4**  
Design the  
Program

## IMPLEMENTING YOUR PROGRAM

### STEP 1

#### Conduct a Needs Assessment

*“Building relationships up front [during the needs assessment process] was really important. . . . In the end, we got results that were so much more meaningful to the project and to the advisory team members.”*

Jennifer Crittenden, MSW  
Assistant Director  
University of Maine  
Center on Aging

Helping ensure your program meets a critical need or fills a gap in care within your community, a needs assessment commonly includes four features: 1) an environmental scan to gather information on the oral health care landscape and health care needs; 2) a market analysis on the outlook for oral health in your community and characteristics of similar oral health programs; 3) a readiness assessment of your organization’s capacity for change and how it aligns with your community’s needs; and 4) a collection of baseline data to measure progress for your program evaluation. Collaborate with other stakeholders in your community to gather valuable knowledge and perspective on the most pressing oral health needs in your community.

### STEP 2

#### Develop a Vision, a Mission, and Goals

Developing your program’s vision, mission, and goals ensures that staff and community partners work toward a common objective. These three elements ultimately help guide your evaluation and quality improvement efforts. Generally, a vision describes what the program aims to accomplish over the long term (i.e., the ideal state), while a mission defines your program’s purpose and reason for existence. Goals are specific and measurable outcomes that align with and contribute to your vision and mission. Set goals that specify *how much of what* will be accomplished *by when*.

### STEP 3

#### Establish Partnerships

Collaboration with additional organizations—such as aging organizations or dental and other community groups that have a stake in oral health—can strengthen your program planning, expand program impact, and help improve and increase the scope and range of available oral health services. Building effective partnerships involves three main efforts: 1) identifying all relevant stakeholders; 2) approaching potential partners with key selling points; 3) and sustaining partnerships over time through mutually beneficial activities.



Smiles for Life dental hygienist serves an older adult at a local senior center in Bellingham, Washington

**STEP 5**  
Finance the Program

**STEP 6**  
Implement the Program

**STEP 7**  
Evaluate the Program

**STEP 8**  
Ensure Sustainability

#### **STEP 4**

### **Design the Program**

As you define your program's scope, you might want to replicate or adapt an existing program or design an entirely new program. Six common options to consider include the dental clinic, mobile-portable, eligibility and enrollment, virtual, event-based, and outreach and education models. Think about whether your program design effectively meets the needs identified during your needs assessment, whether implementing your design is feasible given available financial and social resources, and how your desired design could be integrated into existing models or systems.

#### **STEP 5**

### **Finance the Program**

Obtaining funding is an important element for starting your program and sustaining it over the long term. Throughout the financing process, delivering comprehensive services and achieving financial sustainability might involve tradeoffs. Develop a budget and a business plan, with support from an experienced partner if necessary, to help ensure you secure the funding needed to balance your mission with your financial goals. Consult this section for tips on developing a fundraising plan, searching for grant opportunities with the highest potential for success, considering alternative methods to secure startup funding, and more.

#### **STEP 6**

### **Implement the Program**

As you proceed from planning and preparation to program operations and services delivery, consider several important efforts to help your organization establish efficient processes and refine them over time. Depending on your program's size and scope, as well as on your community's specific needs, you might spend more time on some efforts than others, including establishing policies and procedures for daily activities, onboarding and retaining staff members, recruiting potential clients, developing efficient scheduling and follow-up protocols, minimizing missed appointments, purchasing equipment and supplies, and preparing for program evaluation.

***"Research hospitals in your area and figure out how much money they lose each year on emergency dental charity care. Tell them about the amount of charity care they have to write off each year, and propose they invest it in your oral health program that focuses on prevention."***

Dr. Angie Settle  
West Virginia Health Right



**Dental therapists serve adults in rural Alaska through the Alaska Dental Therapy Educational Program**

*The Virtual Dental Home has provided more than 50,000 dental procedures to over 2,900 individuals since its creation in 2009. Through constant program evaluation and the establishment of strategic partnerships, 15 different communities in California have implemented this program model to date.*

Source: Virtual Dental Home Program

## STEP 7

### Evaluate the Program

By collecting data systematically, from your program's beginning and continuously throughout implementation, you can evaluate its impact (e.g., reaching the triple aim of improved care, improved health, and lower costs per capita) and demonstrate to potential funders that it's worth additional public and private investment. In this way, evaluation that starts before program launch can help ensure long-term sustainability and prioritize oral health in your community. Systematic evaluation also offers the opportunity to identify areas of, and for, improvement—determine what works and what doesn't—and initiate a continuous quality improvement plan.

## STEP 8

### Ensure Sustainability

Sharing program results with partners, funders, and other community stakeholders is fundamental to maintain existing relationships, to attract community support and buy-in, and thereby to ensure your program's long-term sustainability. Explore other sustainability strategies, as well, to ensure your program's continued presence and growth in the community. You might, for instance, develop your value proposition—a presentation of your program's worth—to secure a contract with a health care entity, apply for traditional grant funding, share resources with another organization, or develop a fee-for-service structure, depending on your program's unique circumstances.

### Making a Difference

Despite increasing attention focused on oral health, millions of people—including older adults—still lack access to essential oral health care.<sup>2</sup> Often causing pain, tooth loss, and embarrassment, poor oral health robs them of self-confidence, social interaction, and a healthy, happy smile. It can even affect their ability to seek employment.



Addressing the need for oral health services in your community is no easy feat, but by reading the entire Oral Health Guide, you'll take a critical first step toward developing or enhancing an oral health program that can improve your target population's overall physical and psychological wellbeing. Equipped with this resource, a can-do mindset, and a desire to make a difference, you can prioritize oral health for low-income, underinsured, and uninsured older adults in your community, reaping long-lasting health, social, and financial benefits for all.

<sup>2</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (2012). Oral Health in the US: Key Facts. Retrieved from <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/8324.pdf>



*Thank you for your interest in starting or enhancing an oral health program! Read the entire Oral Health Guide at <https://oralhealth.acl.gov>*