

Help Your Community Smile: Start or Enhance an Oral Health Program for Older Adults



The Problem

Life poses considerable emotional and social challenges for people who lack confidence in their oral health. The condition of their mouth and teeth causes embarrassment for 23 percent of adults. One in four adults avoids smiling because of poor oral health, while 29 percent of low-income adults say the appearance of their mouth and teeth affects even their ability to interview for a job.¹

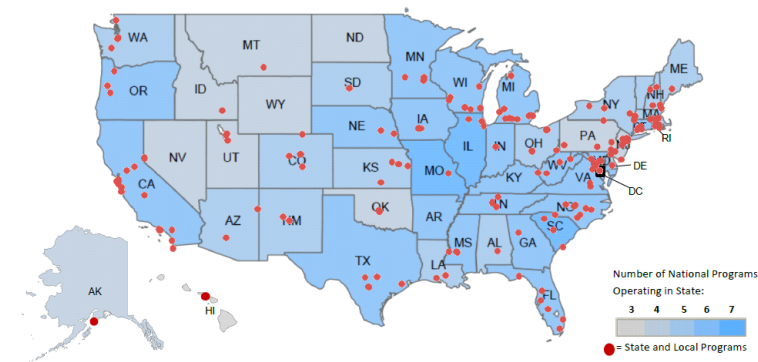
Many older adults, in particular, have significant oral health needs but don't have access to care. More than two-thirds of adults 65 and older endure gum disease; 20 percent suffer complete tooth loss; and 40 percent haven't visited a dental professional in the past year.^{2,3} Sadly, pain is the top oral health problem for low-income adults.⁴

The Solution

Clearly, oral health is strongly connected to overall health and to quality of life, yet a significant gap in levels of access to 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 and replicating successful models is critical to improving access to care for these underserved populations.

The Project

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 entered into an agreement with The Lewin Group to identify and promote vetted, low-cost, community-based oral health services for older adults. This project aimed to develop an online, searchable database of community-based oral health programs across the nation and a comprehensive Community Guide to Adult Oral Health Program Implementation (Oral Health Guide) that offers guidance to communities (e.g., state and local governments, coalitions, advocacy groups, senior centers) interested in starting or enhancing an adult oral health program.



The Website

- **Oral Health Guide:** Find the Oral Health Guide on the website. Brimming with key steps, case studies, and other resources, it explains how to develop and operate cost-effective, sustainable oral health programs for older adults. What's more, if your community already operates such a program, the Oral Health Guide can show you how to expand or enhance it.
- **Oral Health Program Database:** You can peruse the website's database of nearly 200 vetted adult oral health programs among 11 categories, including specific populations, service delivery setting, program funding, and more. Identify the one or ones that best match your community's needs and circumstances.
- **Program Profiles:** Each program profile in the database contains an overview and key characteristics helpful for replication. Featured programs offer additional information on program sustainability and impact.

Visit the website at <https://oralhealth.acl.gov>

How to Start Your Own Oral Health Program

The Oral Health Guide takes a step-by-step approach to designing and implementing a new community-based program or replicating or expanding an existing program. A "roadmap" of eight key steps leads the way.



- Conduct a Needs Assessment
- Develop a Vision, a Mission, and Goals
- Establish Partnerships
- Design the Program
- Finance the Program
- Implement the Program
- Evaluate the Program
- Ensure Sustainability

1 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>
 2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Oral Health for Older Americans. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/adult-oral-health/adult_older.htm
 3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, & National Center for Health Statistics. (2014). Oral and Dental Health. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/dental.htm>
 4 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>