

State Oral Health Programs



Leaders in promoting optimal oral health for everyone

What is a State Oral Health Program?

The State Oral Health Program is a unit of state government, usually in the public health department. It partners with other state and community groups to perform essential public health functions. This includes reporting dental disease rates and improvements in the state's population, developing and implementing policies and programs to prevent or minimize diseases, and assuring that laws and regulations are in place to keep the public safe and healthy. Each state differs in how the program is funded and the services provided.



What Do State Oral Health Programs Do?

- Assess and track dental disease rates to document gains and disparities
- Promote and support prevention services and access to affordable dental care
- Use evidence-based strategies to promote best oral health practices and policies
- Build public/private partnerships to promote and support state and local programs and policies
- Assure an adequate and competent oral health workforce
- Evaluate effectiveness, availability and quality of oral health programs and services.

What Are Examples of Services?

- Systems for collecting, tracking and reporting oral health and program information
- State oral health improvement plans
- Preschool and school-based/linked oral health programs (e.g., fluorides and sealants)
- Community water fluoridation monitoring and reporting
- Policies to assure oral health worker safety and infection prevention and control
- Training and technical assistance
- Loan repayment and other workforce incentives
- Media or education campaigns to educate the public



Why is Oral Health Important?

The mouth and teeth are integral to overall health and well-being. When we lose their functions through disease or injury, we lose our health. Tooth decay, gum disease, other infections and oral cancer can affect people repeatedly at any age and are expensive to treat.

- Increasing numbers (almost 30%) of US children ages two to four already have decayed teeth; many go untreated due to barriers to care.
- Rates of gum disease and tooth loss have decreased, but many adults and older adults can't pay for dental care or don't have dental insurance.
- Oral cancer affects more people than ovarian, cervical, thyroid or brain cancer, and death rates are high.

States are charged with monitoring the health (including oral health) of its citizens and promoting proven, cost-effective ways to prevent disease.

Who Are Significant Partners?

State oral health programs partner with many groups to form broad-based coalitions and to collaborate on joint projects. Partners may include state or local dental and dental hygiene associations; various medical associations; local dental and medical practitioners including those at community health centers, tribal clinics and hospitals; early childhood, K-12 and higher education institutions; dental insurance and state Medicaid/CHIP programs; businesses; advocacy groups and others.

The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) provides help to states through guidelines, competencies, professional development, technical assistance and other resources.

