



In-Depth

Executive Summary of a CT Health Evaluation

February 2008

CONNECTICUT HEALTH FOUNDATION ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

A Retrospective Evaluation of the Initiative to Improve Oral Health & Access to Care

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EVALUATION FOCUS

What progress has the Connecticut Health Foundation (CT Health) made toward the goal it established in 2000 of doubling the number of children in the Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth (HUSKY) Part A Medicaid managed care program receiving dental prevention and treatment? That is the focus of this report.

Our retrospective evaluation concludes that CT Health's support of community-based collaboration, research practices/policy and advocacy improved dental care access for children under Connecticut's HUSKY Part A program.

This evaluation, which examines the foundation's oral health activities (2001-2006), focuses on three areas:

- Whether the foundation's oral health initiative increased dental care access for HUSKY A-enrolled children in their respective communities
- If CT Health-funded projects developed a sustainable structure that will enable them to continue shaping oral health care beyond CT Health funding
- CT Health's role in supporting a community's capacity to provide dental services to HUSKY A-enrolled children, as well as strengthen the systems-of-care* policies shaping oral health delivery

** System of care: Service delivery that builds partnerships, creating a broad, integrated process to guide patients efficiently to the care they need.*

From 2001-2006 CT Health provided over \$8.7 million in grants to community health clinics, collaboratives, researchers and advocates.

BACKGROUND

From 2001-2006, CT Health provided over \$8.7 million in grants to community health clinics, community collaboratives,* researchers and advocates to improve dental care access by HUSKY A-enrolled children. The foundation provided grants to eight community collaboratives, focused on CT Health's goal of doubling the number of children in HUSKY A receiving dental prevention and treatment.

After 2006, the foundation refined its goal to "Improving the oral health of children on HUSKY," with new strategic objectives:

- Increase preventive and treatment visits to the levels achieved by children insured in the private sector
- Identify and promote models of care that improve oral health outcomes for HUSKY A-enrolled children in foundation-funded communities

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Systems of Care

CT Health has galvanized support for improving access to oral health care among academics, practitioners, health care advocates and other service providers. Work has focused on:

- Increasing reimbursement rates for HUSKY A providers
- Funding baseline research about oral health care
- Advocating for funding to increase access to oral health care
- Funding community-based collaboratives

CT Health has generated support to move the Connecticut legislature to increase funding for HUSKY A-enrolled children by promoting advocacy, research and convening discussions on strategy. This effort also has increased awareness about the need for more dentists to care for these children. A substantial gap, however, still exists in meeting these needs.

Many dentists do not participate in HUSKY A for a variety of reasons, including:

- Business-related issues (i.e., high start-up costs, education debt)
- Location of their practice (i.e., urban concentration)
- Insufficient cultural competency
- Low reimbursement for high-cost care
- Poor knowledge of pediatric dentistry
- Unwillingness to treat HUSKY A-enrolled children

* *Community Collaboratives: Groups of Individuals, such as private citizens, policy-makers, and medical professionals with an interest in improving access to oral health.*

System-wide Capacity Issue

The study's primary finding is that there is a system-wide capacity issue. Specifically, Community Health Centers (CHCs) and other safety-net clinics lack:

- Sufficient skilled personnel to plan and manage efficient systems of care
- Full-time staff focused on developing financial resources (i.e., grants, state, federal and private support) to sustain programs

Oral health care also competes against:

- Many other children- and family-oriented health care concerns
- Increasing social service demands for funding too often drawn from the same budget

Workforce Development

Elements that could strengthen the oral health safety net include:

- Enhanced training, licensing and supervision of dental hygienists and dental assistants, who can provide preventive care and conduct screenings
- Increasing efforts to educate general dentists to enable them to see younger children

The evaluation team also became aware of an oral health initiative to enhance efforts to engage pediatricians, the education community and youth media.

Sustainability

Oral health care visits and outreach needs increased as community collaboration, advocacy and systems of care increased access. This put new demands on an organization's staff, office space and other resources.

Collaboratives and their members may require support in planning and development to ensure sustainability as their programs expand to meet their community's oral health needs.

Evaluations like this one reflect CT Health's commitment to collecting and disseminating knowledge, and ensuring that the foundation continues to pursue the most effective course in achieving its mission of improving the health of Connecticut's residents.

For a copy of the complete report, email: info@cthealth.org.

