



Policy Brief

Oral Health Programs in North Dakota

This policy brief (#2) is the second in a series regarding oral health in North Dakota, and is complementary information to a series of fact sheets.

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Introduction

Previous research has identified that, in North Dakota, there is poor distribution of oral health providers, leaving sections of the state with little or no access to oral healthcare services. As a result, American Indian, low income, elderly, and rural residents have lower oral health literacy, and poorer oral health outcomes. More than 25 programs in the state have targeted these populations in an effort to improve the oral health status of all North Dakotans.

In 2014, the Center for Rural Health brought together more than 50 individuals in the state representing

oral health programs, or populations in need of oral health services. Through collaboration, the Center identified current oral health initiatives in the state working to provide care for those in need. Lead representatives from each program were invited to review their respective program descriptions. Following is a presentation of those programs, their managing agencies, and the populations served in North Dakota. This document has been, and will be, updated as new programs are identified. Please refer to the date for latest revisions.

| Program | Agency | Mission/Population Served | Dates |
|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| Bridging the Dental Gap ¹ | United Way | Bridging the Dental Gap is a nonprofit, community dental clinic serving low-income and uninsured individuals within a 100-mile radius of Bismarck-Mandan. Over 600 patient appointments for dental care are provided each month. | 2002–present |
| Case Management and Outreach (CMO) | North Dakota Dental Association (NDDA) | Case Management is a system that incentivizes collaboration between various dental offices and promotes the linking of high-risk patients to dental homes. CMO, with grant funding, will pilot a program encouraging rural dental offices to see more Medicaid patients. In collaboration with the North Dakota Dental Foundation, NDDA plans to implement a multi-year CMO initiative to develop long term goals, secure future funding, and complete an evaluation. | 2016 |
| Children's Dental Health Services (CDS) ² | United Way | CDS provides dental care to children from low incomes families, and education to both children and adults in over 600 locations spread out across Minnesota and North Dakota. In 2014, over 15,000 pregnant women and children were screened by various CDS programs throughout the two states. As of 2016, services are only offered out of Minnesota. | 1919–present |
| Children's Special Health Services ³ (CSHS) | North Dakota Department of Health (DoH) | This program serves children with special health care needs, and their families. In FFY 2014, CSHS Division served 2,442 children statewide; 120 children were served in sixteen multidisciplinary cleft lip and palate clinics held in Bismarck, Minot, and Grand Forks. | Title V (1935); DoH 2007 |

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| Dental Cleaning Program ⁴ | North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) | NDSCS dental hygiene and dental assistant students provide services to 4,500 patients from the Wahpeton-Breckenridge area. Students serve 150 migrant children each summer and 200 American Indian students at the Circle of Nations School in Wahpeton. | |
| Dental Loan Repayment Grants ⁵ | ND DoH; UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences (SMHS) | The state dental loan repayment program is administered by the UND SMHS's Department of Family Medicine Office of Primary Care and financed by the State DoH. Between 2008 and 2014, 26 providers received funding. | 2001–present |
| Donated Dental Services Program ⁶ | Dental Lifeline Network; NDDA; ND DoH | The Donated Dental Services (DDS) program provides free, comprehensive dental services to our nation's most vulnerable individuals with disabilities, those who are elderly, or those with prolonged medical dependence. The volunteer network is made up of 135 dentists in 12 laboratories throughout North Dakota. In the 2014-15 FFY, 48 patients received care for a total value of \$214,317. | 1998–present |
| Drinking Water Program (Fluoride) ⁷ | ND DoH | The Drinking Water Program monitors, plans, and assists with State fluoridation levels to ensure optimum dental benefit. In 2014, 97% of North Dakotans were served by fluoridated public water. | |
| Elderly Care Direct Services Program | U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) & DentaQuest | In partner with the ND DoH, Bridging the Dental Gap, and the Oral Health Coalition, mobile oral health equipment is delivered to long term care facilities around the Bismarck-Mandan region. Care is provided by a dentist. Originally funded by HRSA, this program is now supported by DentaQuest. | 2011–2014 |
| Emergency Charity Care | Family HealthCare Center; Third Street Clinic; volunteer Dentists | In the Grand Forks area, 30 dentists provide emergency oral health care for low-income patients referred from Family HealthCare Center (Fargo) and Third Street Clinic (Grand Forks). In 2015, 16 dentists and 2 oral surgeons provided \$26,546 worth of dental care to 62 patients. | |
| Emergency Room Dental Referral Program | Bridging the Dental Gap; Sanford | In an attempt to lower the number of dental emergencies seen in the Bismarck North Dakota emergency room departments, patients seeking urgent dental care are referred to local dental and health care centers. | 2016 |
| Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) – Providing Oral Healthcare Services ⁸⁻¹⁰ | Northland Health Centers; Family HealthCare Center; Valley Community Health Centers | Community health centers (CHCs) are non-profit healthcare providers that offer care to those who are uninsured or underinsured in high need areas. CHCs are open to all residents regardless of their ability to pay. In North Dakota, oral health services are provided directly by three federally funded CHCs in a total of six satellite locations. Northland Health Centers provides dental care in Rolette, Turtle Lake, and Minot. Family HealthCare Center offers oral health services in Fargo, and Community Health Centers gives care in Grand Forks. These six sites provided dental services for 12,999 patients in 2015. | All currently offer dental care |

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|--|---|--|-------------------------|
| Give Kids a Smile Program ¹¹ | American Dental Association; NDSCS | NDSCS allied dental students perform cleanings, radiographs, sealants, fluoride applications, and oral health education to local, underserved children. In 2015, the program donated over \$13,000 worth of services. | 2003–present |
| Head Start Dental Home Initiative ¹² | American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Office of Head Start | This partnership strives to create dental homes for North Dakota children enrolled in the Head Start programs throughout the State. The intent of the program is to build a community of trained parents, Head Start staff, and dentists who can recognize and provide oral health care to children. | 2008–present |
| Children’s Health Insurance Program ¹³ | ND Department of Human Services | In 2013, 84.3% of eligible children participated in North Dakota’s Children’s Health Insurance Program, Healthy Steps, or Medicaid. As of June 2016, North Dakota has enrolled 89,914 individuals in Medicaid and CHIP. For those participating in the specific dental program, services include: cleanings, fluoride treatment, sealants, x-rays, orthodontics, oral surgeries, and other important dental services. | 1997–present |
| Jerene’s Wish ¹⁴ | Watford Orthodontics | Jerene’s Wish provides orthodontic treatment at a minimal cost to eligible children. The program has provided service for over 30 Jerene’s Wish participants with a value exceeding \$150,000. | 2006–present |
| Mission of Mercy ¹⁵ | Minnesota Dental Association; Minnesota Dental Foundation; NDDA; North Dakota Dental Foundation | Mission of Mercy is a volunteer clinic offering free oral health care to all who come in for the one weekend event hosted in 2014 and 2016. In July 2016, 800 Minnesota and North Dakota volunteers partnered together to provide over \$1 million of free care. Mission of Mercy in Moorhead saw 1,391 patient visits and provided 7,655 dental procedures including: 1,003 fillings; 1,394 extractions; 1,418 x-rays; 292 cleanings; 81 dentures; and, 59 root canals. | 2014; 2016 |
| North Dakota Dental Foundation ¹⁶ | Dakota Medical Foundation (DMF) | The Foundation aims to remove barriers to receiving dental care in North Dakota by supporting skilled committed dentists, hygienists, and assistants throughout the state. | DMF funded 1996–present |
| North Dakota Health Tracks ¹⁷ | North Dakota Department of Human Services | Health Tracks is the name of North Dakota Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program. Tracks is a preventive health program for infants up to age 21 who qualify for the North Dakota Medicaid Program. Services include dental screenings, orthodontics, vision screenings, counseling, vaccinations, and other essential health services. | 1967–present |
| North Dakota Oral Health Coalition ¹⁸ | ND DoH | The coalition consists of motivated members throughout the State that work together to provide care for those in need. The mission is to develop and promote innovative strategies to achieve optimal oral health for all North Dakotans. Previous work includes mobile care, pediatric dental days, and Smiles for Life promotion. | 2005–present |
| Red River Valley Dental Access Project ¹⁹ | United Way; DMF; Minnesota Dental Association | The Red River Valley Dental Access Project provides immediate dental care for low-income patients. Urgent care walk-in dental clinic services are offered every Tuesday from 5:30 pm – 7:45 pm at an individual cost of \$30.00. | 2002–present |

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|---|--|---|--------------|
| Ronald McDonald Care Mobile ²⁰ | Ronald McDonald House Charities, Inc. | The care mobile provides access to oral health care to underserved children ages 0-21 in their own neighborhoods. In 2014, the mobile traveled for 39 weeks serving 1,008 children for a value of \$477,896. The mobile is staffed by a full, paid, dental care team; care is reimbursable. | 2009–present |
| Seal! ND ²¹ | ND DoH | The program provides dental sealant treatments for elementary-aged children to help prevent dental decay. Students in elementary school with free and reduced-free meal rate of 50% or greater are offered the services for free. | 2008–present |
| Smiles Change Lives ²² (SCL) | The Virginia Brown Community Orthodontic Partnership; 3M | This program provides access to orthodontic treatment for children from families that cannot afford the full cost of braces. Nationally, SCL has treated over 8,000 children since it began in 1997. There are five providers in North Dakota: Danel Orthodontics; Feil Orthodontics; Hollevoet Orthodontics; Jespersion Orthodontics (2). | 1997–present |
| Smiles for Life ²³ | ND DoH | Smiles for Life is an online oral health training curriculum. Health-care providers may use this tool to develop their knowledge on a variety of oral health care issues. The curriculum is designed to enhance the clinicians role in the advancement of oral health for all age groups. | 2012–present |
| State Oral Health Program ²⁴ | ND DoH | The goals of the State Oral Health Program are to: advance the oral health of North Dakotans through prevention and education; encourage the use of innovative and cost-effective methods to oral health promotion and disease prevention; pursue development of community and statewide partnerships to promote oral health; improve access to dental care; and, identify and reduce oral health disparities among specific population groups. | 2015–present |
| Take “5” Program ²⁵ | NDDA | This program challenges dentists to see, “5 more” Medicaid patients in a week, month, or year; 75 dentists initially signed up. | 2015–present |
| Tribal Pediatric Dental Days | North Dakota Head Start Dental Home Initiative | Spirit Lake Pediatric Dental Day provided over \$100,000 of dental services to 232 children. Nine pediatric dentists, two oral surgeons, and five general dentists aided in the oral health efforts. In 2013, the two-day pediatric dental clinic was held in Standing Rock. The value of dental treatment provided to the 367 children who attended was more than \$150,000. | 2011; 2013 |
| Varnish North Dakota ²⁶ | U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; HRSA; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention | Varnish North Dakota targets oral health needs of the State by providing education to the medical workforc; specifically, instruction on how to provide preventative screens and oral health assessments to their patients. As of 2012, 218 trained healthcare professionals have accessed the Smiles for Life fluoride course. | 2008–present |

Conclusion

While the listed programs are meeting the needs of underserved residents, many of the identified programs rely on charity care, grant dollars, and/or donated time by oral health providers and their partnering agencies. With inconsistent, and unreliable funding, the provided care is not sustainable, nor can patients rely on the services being offered. Sporadic, inconsistent, quality care is better than no care, but it is not a dependable model. North Dakota residents need a dental home, access to care, reliable services, and care at a cost that they can afford. Additionally, oral health must be made a priority among other health professions (primary care, long term care, etc.).

Policy Implications

In order to provide consistent and reliable care for all North Dakota residents, the state must look to implement solutions that would increase access, utilization, and oral health literacy for low income, American Indian, rural, and elderly residents in North Dakota.

State Support

Preventative and restorative programs that have proven impact on the State's oral health outcomes are inadequately and unreliably funded, reducing the access to effective care. As an example, Seal! ND had to reduce the number of North Dakota students receiving dental sealants in school settings (a reimbursable service) because of a lag in grant dollars over a one-year period.

Additionally, North Dakota federally funded community health centers receive one of the lowest rates of state financial support (4%). Community Health centers are providing dental care to North Dakota residents, however, they need financial support from the state to expand services, increase the oral health workforce, and open additional satellite locations. See *Oral Health Care Service in North Dakota Community Health Care Centers* at ruralhealth.und.edu/pdf/nd-oral-healthcare-services-community-centers.pdf for more information.

Reimbursement for new care models has also been a point of contention for programs providing care to

the elderly in long term care settings, and for those offering non-traditional services like case management, referral, and oral health education. Organized oral health provider groups must continue to work with the State and third party insurers to cover the cost of effective preventive services that may not be provided in traditional settings.

Support from all Health Professions

The idea that oral health is a concern for only dental professionals will result in poor oral health status for North Dakota residents. There are opportunities to improve oral health literacy, access, and utilization of care through collaboration with other health professions. As an example, primary care providers and pediatricians see patients at a younger age than do dentists. These provider types have the opportunity to do an oral health assessment, and apply fluoride varnish (a reimbursable service) to all pediatric patients. However, this care is not consistently offered. Read *Fluoride Varnish Application in Primary Care Settings* at ruralhealth.und.edu/pdf/fluoride-varnish-application-primary-care.pdf for more information. The North Dakota Dental Association is also working to create a referral program in local emergency rooms, again attesting that hospitals and clinics must also recognize the importance of oral health.

A North Dakota assessment of long term care providers also found a lack of strong oral health literacy among direct care staff. Providers were not offering daily, consistent care, and appropriate referrals were not available to all facilities. Read *Oral Healthcare in North Dakota Long Term Care Facilities* at ruralhealth.und.edu/pdf/north-dakota-oral-health-long-term-care.pdf.

The State Department of Health has offered free, online education for health care providers to assist in identification of oral health conditions, and to increase oral health referrals. This opportunity (Smiles for Life) has not been readily utilized by providers, though the state department has shared the training with state health professional organizations. It is imperative that direct care providers recognize the mouth as part of holistic patient care, completing assessments when appropriate, and referring patients to dental homes.

Workforce

Workforce research has found that the state is in need of dentists and dental assistants. The dental workforce is aging and disproportionately located in urban centers of the state. Those in urban area also limit the number of Medicaid patients seen. Read *Dental Workforce in Rural and Urban North Dakota* at ruralhealth.und.edu/pdf/north-dakota-dental-workforce.pdf and *Educating the Oral Healthcare Workforce in North Dakota* at ruralhealth.und.edu/pdf/educating-nd-oral-healthcare-workforce.pdf.

Efforts must look to increase the dental workforce, while finding incentives for existing and new providers to accept and see those patients in greatest need of care. Several new workforce models have been proposed in the state to include expanding dental hygiene to permit more community based services, working with border dental schools for residency positions in rural or high need areas of North Dakota, expanding CHCs and their dental workforce to meet the needs of more underserved patients, tele-dentistry, and dental therapy.

Program Websites

- ¹ bridgingthedentalgap.com
- ² childrensdentalservices.org
- ³ www.ndhealth.gov/cshs/
- ⁴ www.ndscs.edu/news_events/news/8763
- ⁵ www.med.und.edu/family-medicine/workforce.cfm
- ⁶ dentallifeline.org/north-dakota/
- ⁷ www.ndhealth.gov/MF/dw.html
- ⁸ www.northlandchc.or
- ⁹ www.famhealthcare.org
- ¹⁰ www.valleychc.org
- ¹¹ www.adafoundation.org/en/give-kids-a-smile
- ¹² www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/headstart/docs/2011-2015-ndhssco-strategic-plan.pdf
- ¹³ www.nd.gov/dhs/services/medicalserv/chip/
- ¹⁴ warfordorthodontics.com/giving-back/
- ¹⁵ www.mndental.org/events/mission-of-mercy/results/nddental.org
- ¹⁶ www.nd.gov/dhs/services/medicalserv/health-tracks/
- ¹⁷ www.ndohc.org
- ¹⁸ www.rrdentalaccess.com
- ¹⁹ www.rmhcibismarck.org/caremobile/
- ²⁰ www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/sealnd.htm
- ²¹ www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/sealnd.htm

- ²² www.smileschangelives.org
- ²³ www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/ndsmilesforlife.htm
- ²⁴ www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/
- ²⁵ www.legis.nd.gov/files/committees/64-2014%20appendices/17_5053_03000appendixg.pdf
- ²⁶ www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/FluorideVarnish.htm

For more information

Visit the CRH webpage for additional oral health publications and information.
ruralhealth.und.edu/what-we-do/oral-health

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