

Tennessee State Oral Health Plan

Annual Update – August 2023

Introduction

August 2022 marked the initial phase of implementing Tennessee’s second statewide, comprehensive oral health plan. The 2022 Edition of the Tennessee State Oral Health Plan supports the mission of the Tennessee Department of Health (Tennessee Department of Health), “to protect, promote, and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee”.

Building on Tennessee’s long-standing commitment to improving oral health in Tennessee, the 2022 Tennessee State Oral Health Plan details how the Tennessee Department of Health is working to improve dental care access and expand Tennessee’s dental care workforce. Additionally, the Plan includes recommendations that serve as a guide for the Department’s work in improving oral health. Recommendations focus on four key areas:

1. Access to Care
2. Oral Health Education and Advocacy
3. Prevention of Oral Disease
4. Oral Health Resources and Workforce

Over the course of the last year, Oral Health Services (OHS) staff has been diligent to identify and initiate new, while also fostering existing, working relationships with partners and stakeholders to fulfill the obligation to implement this plan over the course of the next five years.

Below is a report on the outcome of those efforts and accomplishments as we conclude Year 1.

Access to Care

- Recommendation 1: Improve Tennessee Department of Health dental clinic capacity and improve Tennessee Department of Health staffing models.
OHS evaluated clinical efficiency through number of patient visits, services provided, and by performing patient flow analyses at multiple sites across the state. OHS implemented a TDH Model Clinic plan to increase clinical capacity.
- Recommendation 2: Promote adult oral health benefits in the Tennessee Medicaid Programs and expand efforts to insure persons without dental coverage.
TDH signed up as participating providers for adult Medicaid expansion. Basic Dental Care services were expanded to uninsured adults as of Jan. 1, 2023, in TDH Dental Clinics.
- Recommendation 3: Assess options and need for a Tennessee Department of Health oral health surveillance system.
OHS staff attended a surveillance workshop at the National Oral Health Conference and learned about ASTDD support available. TDH Preventive Block Grant funding was secured to begin the planning process for a TN Oral Health statewide survey.
- Recommendation 4: Raise awareness and support utilization of Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHCs).
OHS gathered a list of TDH staff interested in CDHC training and evaluated educational and grant options that were shared with staff statewide.

Oral Health Education and Advocacy

- Recommendation 1: To raise awareness of the importance of oral health to overall health.
OHS partnered with primary care sites, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Community Health Access and Navigation in Tennessee (CHANT) for referrals to TDH dental clinics.
- Recommendations 2: Raise dental provider awareness of their role in substance abuse prevention.
OHS ordered opioid alternative info cards for providers and patients for distribution at TDH Dental Clinics. Controlled Substance Monitoring Database (CSMD) training was provided at TDH annual trainings and information was added to the TDH website with educational and referral resources for providers. Continuing education opportunities

for substance abuse awareness and responsible prescription writing were offered to dental staff statewide.

- Recommendation 3: Work with existing prevention programs for public awareness of the effects of tobacco in the oral cavity.
OHS provided information to School Based Dental Prevention staff on ordering educational materials for display at school and community events. Staff were encouraged to display tobacco education posters at school and community events. OHS secured a speaker for statewide dental conference to present pioneering research on vaping and the effects on oral health.
- Recommendation 4: Work with community partners to increase public awareness of the impact of diet on oral health.
Dental Nutrition information was provided by a subject-matter expert during annual training for dental staff. The SBDPP staff were encouraged to develop and display educational information regarding sugar in diet and its effect on oral health at health fairs, and community events.

Prevention of Oral Disease

- Recommendation 1: Encourage greater use of sealants by dental providers to prevent pit and fissure caries in permanent molar teeth of children.
UT rotation students trained on the importance of sealants and SDF. The Assistant State Dental Director presented information to ETSU dental hygiene students regarding the sealant aspect of this preventive program and its positive impact.
- Recommendation 2: Expand existing School Based Dental Prevention Program.
OHS received funding from TennCare to increase staff and expand the SBDPP Program. A legislative request to create additional positions was approved.
- Recommendation 3: Continue to research and advocate for newly approved products and techniques to improve and/or arrest dental decay.
A vendor agreement for an innovative product to treat non-cavitated caries lesions was established and information was presented to TDH staff. OHS attended a presentation on an early caries detection dental diagnostic tool for potential consideration for use in the School Based Dental Prevention Program.

- Recommendation 4: Organize state-wide information and raise awareness of the benefits of community water fluoridation.
OHS Dental leadership shared water plant meeting updates to increase opportunities for collaborative efforts and to strengthen partnerships. OHS added new consumer-focused community water fluoridation materials to the website, including infographics.

Oral Health Resources and Workforce

- Recommendation 1: Develop and research opportunities to enhance professional integration between oral health providers and medical providers.
OHS staff attended a National Oral Health Presentation titled “National Action: Framework to Accelerate Whole-Person Integrated Care”, partnered with TDH primary care clinics for referrals, and worked with nursing to review protocol and update the periodicity schedule for the Nurse's Fluoride Varnish Program.
- Recommendation 2: Expand partnerships with dental training programs.
UT dental students are participating in in student rotations provided by OHS for dental training. Chattanooga State Dental Hygiene students are slated to begin student rotations in TDH dental clinics. A partnership with Meharry dental students and staff will allow services and training to be provided at previously vacant TDH Dental Clinics.
- Recommendation 3: Actively seek funding for Tennessee Department of Health dental clinics to expand the targeted population to include uninsured adults and partner with Safety Net Clinics to expand their oral health reach.
- Recommendation 4: Request Tennessee Department of Health - Health Related Boards collect information on practicing status of dentist and hygienist during licensure and license renewal.
- Recommendation 5: Map existing dental resources for public and provider use.
OHS created a map to show safety net dental clinic locations and the poverty rate across all 95 counties to relate the location of dental clinics and density of low-income households. The Dental Care for Tennesseans map was updated on the OHS website.