

Amador County – Improving Oral Health Services for Amador’s Children.

CSAC Challenge Award 2016 (Under 50,000)

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Challenge: Lack of oral health services for children.

Dental caries is the most common chronic medical problem in children. Early childhood caries (ECC) is defined as tooth decay found in the primary dentition of children younger than 6 years. It is five times more prevalent than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. Early childhood caries affect more than 50% of children by kindergarten. Even though the importance of early preventative care is well documented, access to such care in rural counties is limited. Amador County has only one Denti-Cal provider in the county making it necessary for most families to travel approximately 60 miles each way to access dental services. Those families requiring anesthesia services for dental treatment must travel even longer distances to facilities in Salida, Stockton, or Atwater for example.

Given the above challenges, Amador’s Oral Health Task Force (OHTF) led by First 5 Amador and Amador County Public Health’s Maternal Child Adolescent Program provided funding for approximately 10 years for oral health education, screenings, and fluoride varnish treatments for children in preschools, playgroups, and childcare centers. Approximately 25% of Amador’s age-eligible children received these services twice per year. In an effort to reach more children, free screenings and fluoride varnish treatments were provided by volunteer dental hygienists to approximately 100 children at annual children’s fairs.

However, with funding cuts to vital programs, the OHTF rallied to develop a sustainable system to fill the gap. Task Force members identified pediatric medical providers as a possible source of fluoride application as they have ready access to young children through their well-child preventative exams. The sustainability of this project was made possible when California’s Managed Medi-Cal Division allowed topical application of fluoride varnish as a Medi-Cal benefit for children younger than 6 years of age.

Innovative Solution: A sustainable system embedded in the pediatric well-child checkup.

Seeing a need to establish a sustainable oral health prevention system, Amador County Public Health and First 5 Amador researched fluoride varnish application and oral health screenings in a medical setting (i.e. pediatrician’s office). During Amador’s work in developing a system, the Academy of Pediatrics came out with a recommendation that supported this concept along with the Managed

MediCal Branch at CDPH identifying fluoride varnish as a medical benefit reimbursable by the MediCal program.

Amador (Continued)

Parents hold physicians' recommendations in high regard and the well-child checkup schedule allows for frequent contact with families. First 5 Amador and Public Health presented the idea to Amador's only pediatric medical office which agreed to pilot the program.

Originality: Being used as a model for other counties as well as a statewide system change.

In an effort to share the success of this systems change, Sutter Pediatric staff and First 5 Amador's Executive Director presented this practice at a regional Sutter Pediatric meeting and responded to a request to provide testimony before the Little Hoover Commission.

Amador's Oral Health Task Force members have received multiple inquiries from other counties to learn more about the comprehensive system and how it could be replicated in their areas.

Cost Effectiveness: This system creates a sustainable method for delivering vital prevention services through health insurance reimbursement.

With the new recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Amador's Supervising Health Nurse researched the possibility of having medical offices bill insurance for the services. The reimbursement rate made it advantageous for the Sutter Pediatric medical office to incorporate the practice in the children's well-child checkups and allowed them to provide a valuable link to an important component of overall well-being for young children.

A small grant was applied for and received through the Sutter Medical Foundation to assist with start-up costs. The system is now in place and sustainable at the site that serves the majority of Amador County's children as well as many from our neighboring county -- Calaveras. Amador's Oral Health Task Force members will share this information with other medical offices in the county in an attempt to reduce the need for children to access extensive dental services thereby improving overall health and school attendance.

Results: Increased number of children receiving important health services and a model for other county and medical systems.

During the first 8 months of the pilot, Sutter Amador Pediatrics more than tripled the number of fluoride varnish treatments offered in previous years. The goal is now to expand this practice to all medical offices in Amador that provide care for young children.

Amador has been contacted by multiple entities interested in replicating this system. The Little Hoover Commission included Amador County in their report (Report #230, April 2016) and an article regarding Amador County's work in the area of children's oral health was published in the Nugget -- a publication of the Sacramento District Dental Society (May, 2016).