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Advocating For Oral Health Policy In New York State

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Background

Oral health is an integral, but often neglected, part of overall health. In recent years there has been a national call to action to address Americans' dental health, most notably the Surgeon General's 2000 report describing the gross disparities of oral health status among different racial and socioeconomic groups, which highlights that an individual's oral health may be linked to a multitude of poor health outcomes, such as heart and lung disease, stroke, low birth weight and premature birth. Additionally, the promotion of oral health is a focus area of the Healthy People 2010 objectives. In New York State, 60% of low-income children have dental caries (cavities) and 41% of those children have untreated disease.

Project

This project was designed to increase awareness of oral health on the New York State public policy level, as well as develop the infrastructure for the New York State Oral Health Coalition. Coordination of an Oral Health Advocacy Day mobilized statewide stakeholders to educate and inform the Senate and Assembly on key oral health messages, and to advocate for funding in the 2007-2008 budget. Specifically, \$4 million is outlined for dental sealant programs and \$1 million for regional oral health networks. Infrastructure development for the New York State Oral Health Coalition has included advising the 13-member Steering Committee on organizational structure, leadership roles and responsibilities, membership and the creation of a one-year strategic plan.