

School-Community Partnerships for Children's Oral Health in West Virginia

The Appalachian Regional Commission and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation have collaborated to fund a \$500,000 grant for children's oral health in West Virginia. The purpose of this grant is to increase access to preventive dental services for youth in West Virginia through school–community partnerships. Funding from these agencies will be used to support schools and their local communities to provide preventive services for needy children. It will be managed by the Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health at Marshall University.

Poor oral health among children and teens is a large problem in WV. In most rural areas access to dental care is limited by distance, the lack of public transportation and the isolation of mountainous terrain. The Surgeon General's report on dental health recognized school-based services, in particular sealant programs, as an effective method for improving oral health of youth.

The target population is school-age youth without dental insurance in distressed, at-risk and transitional counties of West Virginia, with one priority being sealant for children in 2nd and 6th grades (8 and 14 year olds). The preventive services will be taken to the school, where the children are. This way all children who have parental permission can be served at once, without the logistical problems of transporting and supervising children off campus. The grant will fund the purchase of portable equipment that can be easily transported and set up at school. Additionally, parents and community members at large will have the opportunity to avail themselves of the preventive services.

The project will be implemented by offering small community grants in the range of \$15,000 to \$25,000 to schools and community groups that want to implement preventive services. The grant application will require collaboration between the school, local dentists and other health care organizations such as primary care centers and health departments. These organizations will apply for a one-time grant that will fund portable equipment, support planning and coordinating activities, and implement a database for monitoring and outcome measurement. Since every site will have unique resources and needs, it is important that the potential grantees have a well thought out plan for implementing the dental services.

The outcomes of this project will be increased preventive services for children and adolescents, increased number of counties with sealant programs, reduced caries and dental decay, increased number of students with a dental home and the establishment of a dental health surveillance system.

The project will be managed by a team from the Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health at Marshall University. They will manage the community grant application process, provide technical assistance, and manage the surveillance system. An oversight committee will review and approve the grants and monitor the overall progress of the grant. It is comprised of representatives from the ARC, Benedum, the Dental Director of the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health, the Chair of the Department of Dental Practice and Rural Health at the West Virginia University School of Dentistry, and the Center for Rural Health at Marshall University.

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