

Innovations in Rural Oral Health: Partner and Stakeholder Collaboration Case Summary

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Presenter Name and Organization: Stacey Chazin, Director of Education and Leadership, American Institute of Dental Public Health

Case Overview: A farming community in Iowa faces challenges accessing dental care due to distance and financial constraints. The local health department partners with a mobile dental clinic organization to provide comprehensive dental services on a rotating basis.

Ask of the Group:

1. How can the local health department collaborate with the mobile dental clinic organization to identify suitable locations and plan the schedule for the mobile clinic visits?
2. What strategies can be employed to engage and involve community leaders, schools, and local businesses in supporting and promoting the mobile dental clinic's visits?
3. Discuss the importance of ongoing communication and coordination among the health department, mobile clinic organization, and the community to ensure the sustained success of the initiative and the improvement of oral health outcomes.

Recommendations

- ▶ Use conceptual frameworks such as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to guide engagement and community involvement.
- ▶ Explore the presence of local or state oral health coalitions that could serve as neutral conveners for initial meetings between the local health department and the mobile dental clinic to align goals and expectations.
- ▶ Engage the community from the start of the planning process and keep them engaged throughout the project's lifespan. Tap into their technical expertise and access to information and other resources. This recognizes community leaders and stakeholders as experts on their own needs and how those can be met.



Recommendations, continued

- ▶ Involve the community in a needs assessment to determine populations of high need and where those populations would be served most efficiently, ensuring optimal resource allocation.
- ▶ Utilize an intern to conduct a needs assessment.
- ▶ Define sustained success and metrics upfront to monitor progress and impact throughout the initiative. Include patient- and community-level metrics and expectations for success, with a focus on oral health outcomes.
- ▶ Foster relationships among key stakeholder organizations and individuals as the foundation for collaboration. If possible, prioritize face-to-face interactions to establish rapport and a shared understanding of community needs and program goals.
- ▶ Work with community leaders and stakeholders from nontraditional sources such as local businesses, faith communities, and schools (this could be particularly helpful in identifying suitable locations for the mobile dental clinic visits).
- ▶ Strategize to identify pivotal gathering spaces within the community, with insights from community leaders.
- ▶ Seek input from community leaders on the optimal timing for mobile clinic visits and ways to encourage and operationalize scheduling of community members.
- ▶ Utilize expert stakeholders such as dental schools and dental associations as partners to provide technical expertise.
- ▶ Establish a sustainability plan that outlines alternative options for community members to access care after the mobile resources have left. Include strategies for communicating these options to residents and the organizations that serve them.
- ▶ Deliver care and education in a culturally responsive way, which will in turn support continuity and systematic care delivery.
- ▶ Keep the same people delivering care year after year for continuity and consistent relationships.
- ▶ Recognize and celebrate program milestones while involving the community to measure success collaboratively.



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