



OVERVIEW OF THE ACCESS TO BABY AND CHILD DENTISTRY (ABCD) PROGRAM: Increasing access to care for young Medicaid-eligible children

THE ABCD PROGRAM. ABCD focuses on expanding access to oral health services in Washington state by providing preventive and restorative dental care to Medicaid-eligible children from birth through age five, with the emphasis on enrollment by age one. It is based on the premise that starting dental visits early will yield positive behaviors by both parents and children, thereby helping to control the caries process and reduce the need for costly future restorative work.

In 1995, the first ABCD program was established in Spokane, Washington as a collaborative effort between public and private sector partners who came together to address the severe lack of dental access for high-risk preschool children. The proposed solution was the development of the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) Program. Its success has led other county dental societies and health districts across Washington to adopt the program, and has prompted interest from other states.

HOW WASHINGTON'S PROGRAM WORKS. ABCD is a collaborative effort of Washington Dental Service Foundation, the University of Washington School of Dentistry, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Washington State Dental Association, the Department of Health, local dental societies, and local health jurisdictions.

LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS. The ABCD Program in each county is locally administered by the health jurisdiction or a community agency that contracts with the health department. They work with the ABCD dental champion, dental society and ABCD-participating dentists, provide active outreach to organizations in which Medicaid-eligible children receive services, identify and enroll 0-5 year olds, orient the child's family to the program, and match each child with an ABCD-certified dentist. The health jurisdiction provides ongoing *case management* services to ABCD families. The program works with ABCD families who have difficulty keeping dental appointments, assuring that obstacles to care, such as lack of transportation and language barriers, are addressed.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS. The health department coordinates with local outreach agencies and others to identify and refer eligible clients. The ABCD program has been embedded in many local Head Start, Early Head Start, and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Nutrition programs, which enroll and orient their clients, and at the same time, help achieve the agency's client oral health objectives.

ABCD FAMILIES. In their program orientation, enrolled families are coached about the need for early and preventive dental care, and dental office etiquette, including the need to keep appointments. The resulting no-show rate is significantly lower than in non-ABCD practices.

DENTISTS. ABCD encourages *general dental offices* to provide a positive dental experience and a dental home by age one. The process of identifying and recruiting general dentists to the ABCD Program begins with the support and assistance of the *local dental society*, which sponsors an initial ABCD informational meeting with local dentists and ABCD state dental leadership and subsequently promotes the program to

the membership. The county's *ABCD Dental Champion*, a leading pediatric dentist (or a general dentist in areas without pediatric coverage) is selected and trained by the University of Washington to identify, recruit, train and mentor local general dentists.

More than 1000 dentists have been trained in the ABCD Program's focus on early pediatric dental techniques and preventive services and are certified by the University of Washington School of Dentistry's pediatric dentistry staff. In the training, with continuing dental education credits subsidized by the ABCD program, the dentist and his/her team learn and practice the lap-to-lap examination procedure as a better method than using a dental chair for examining very young children. Dentists are encouraged to use atraumatic restorative technique (ART) when providing restorative therapy as a transitional method for restoring teeth in infants and toddlers.

ABCD certified general dentists receive enhanced Medicaid reimbursement for selected procedures for enrolled children, including oral evaluation, family oral health education, fluoride varnish application, and certain restorative procedures. Dental front office staff receives training in communication and culturally appropriate follow-up with the client families and the billing staff learns how to work with the Medicaid program. By scheduling patients appropriately and effectively using the auxiliary staff to assist the family in oral health education components of the visits, a productive and cost-effective program can be implemented.

Flexibility is a hallmark of the program; participating private practices accept enrolled clients at a caseload level determined by each practice and at the same time, clients have freedom of choice in selecting a dental provider. Education and support encourages dentists in private practice to increase their commitment to expanding dental access in the community. The emphasis on non-traumatic techniques and oral health education encourages families to seek and accept regular dental care.

PHYSICIANS. With the growth of the ABCD program, an increasing number of Washington physicians are now willing to address oral health during well-child checks because ABCD-trained dentists serve as referral sources. Medicaid reimburses trained and certified primary care providers for delivering oral screenings, health education and fluoride varnish during well-child checks and referral to a dentist as needed.

WASHINGTON DENTAL SERVICE FOUNDATION. Washington Dental Service Foundation is the state's largest foundation committed to improving oral health. The Foundation supports a variety of innovative oral health programs focused on preventing oral disease, expanding access to dental care and increasing awareness of the importance of oral health, including the ABCD Program. The Foundation offers three-year start up grants to Washington counties (at approximately half of the program costs over the first three years of program operation), leadership and administrative support of the statewide ABCD Partnership, and on-going program evaluation. Washington Dental Service Foundation is funded by the Washington Dental Service (WDS), a non-profit dental benefits company serving more than 2 million people throughout the state that is a member of the nationwide Delta Dental Plans Association.

OUTCOMES TO DATE.

- Medicaid utilization rates for Washington children have increased substantially. ABCD has doubled the number of young Medicaid children in Washington who are receiving dental care -- from 40,000 to 98,000, a utilization increase from 21% to 37% in the last 10 years.
- The program is also making progress in increasing the number of children who receive care before their second birthday, the best time for early intervention and consistent with the best practice goal of seeing all children for preventive services by their first birthday. In 2007, nearly 19,000 children under age two, 16.7 percent of eligible children received dental services. When the program was initiated in 1997, only three percent of eligible infants and toddlers received dental care.
- ABCD patients are more likely to seek care before oral health problems arise.
- Providers who have received ABCD training and participate in the program are more comfortable seeing young children and have a highly favorable view of the program.

- Twelve nationally published articles have demonstrated that early prevention reduces future dental care costs and that ABCD is an effective, cost-saving method of improving the oral health status of Medicaid-enrolled young children.

EVIDENCE BASED. Many components of the ABCD program are evidenced based. Examples and related research include:

Early intervention:

- Source: Alm, Wendt, Koch, Birkhed “Oral Hygiene and Parent-Related Factors during Early Childhood in Relation to Approximal Caries at 15 Years of Age” *Caries Res* 2008;42:28–36
- Source: Savage, M., Lee, J., Kotch, J., & Vann, W., *Early Preventive Dental Visits: Effects on Subsequent Utilization and Costs.* *Pediatrics*, 114(4), October 2004.
- Source: Caufield, P., Cutter, G., and Dasanayake, A. *Initial Acquisition of Mutans Streptococci by Infants: Evidence for a Discrete Window of Infectivity.* *Journal of Dental Research.* 1993, 72(1): 37-456.

Fluoride Varnish

- Rozier RG. Effectiveness of methods used by dental professionals for the primary prevention of dental caries. *J Dent Educ* 2001;65(10): 1063-72.
- Marinho VC, Higgins JP, Logan S, Sheiham A. Fluoride varnishes for preventing dental caries in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2002(3):CD002279.
- Marinho VC, Higgins JP, Logan S, Sheiham A. Topical fluoride (toothpastes, mouthrinses, gels or varnishes) for preventing dental caries in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2003(4):CD002782.
- Weintraub JA, Ramos-Gomez F, Jue B, et al. Fluoride varnish efficacy in preventing early childhood caries. *J Dent Res* 2006;85(2): 172-6.
- Autio-Gold, Courts. “Assessing the effect of fluoride varnish on early enamel carious lesions in the primary dentition”. *Journal of the American Dental Association* Vol. 132, pp. 1247-1253
- Quinonez, Stearns, Talekar, Rozier, Downs. “Simulating Cost-effectiveness of Fluoride Varnish During Well-Child Visits for Medicaid-Enrolled Children”. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Vol 160, Feb 2006
- Ramos-Gomez, Shepard. “Cost-effectiveness model for prevention of early childhood caries”. *Jour Calif Dental Assoc.* 1999 Jul;27(7):539-44.

We appreciate your interest in the ABCD program and welcome the opportunity to further discuss this innovative approach to increasing access to care for young Medicaid-eligible children.

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"Working with families referred to us by ABCD has been unbelievably gratifying. We have been fortunate to treat wonderful children whose parents or caregivers truly appreciate and value our services."
Eve Rutherford, DDS, Snohomish County, Washington ABCD Dental Champion



"I love seeing the small children. It's important they have a dental home at a young age to increase their chances of having good oral health for a lifetime."
ABCD participating dentist in a 2008 survey of Washington ABCD providers