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ORAL HEALTH FOUNDATION PROVIDES \$4M IN GRANT FUNDING

Programs will increase oral health care access for thousands of residents

(Boston, MA) – The Oral Health Foundation recently provided \$4 million in funding to several initiatives across the state that collectively will increase oral health care access to thousands of Massachusetts residents.

The funding is an important step in addressing both a severe shortage of dentists in many areas of the state and the lack of access to oral health care faced by many Massachusetts residents. A recent report released by the Catalyst Institute and the Massachusetts Coalition for Oral Health found that 69 cities and towns have no dentists at all, and that more than half of the state’s municipalities do not have a dentist that accepts MassHealth.

“There are 2 million Massachusetts residents, mostly children, who do not have access to oral health care,” said Ralph Fuccillo, president of the Oral Health Foundation. “It is our goal to shift the paradigm of poor oral health from a narrow focus on treatment gaps to an action-oriented approach that addresses the causes of the inexcusable disparities we see in oral health throughout the Commonwealth.”

The Foundation’s current grants will create school-based programs, expand oral health care for people living with HIV/AIDS, and establish clinics in underserved areas of the state. Its funding will also be used to replace outdated computer systems and old equipment, greatly increasing capacity and eliminating long waiting lists – some of which stretch longer than a year – at several community health centers that provide dental services.

This year’s grant recipients including the following:

- Hilltown Community Health Center -- to increase its volume of both patient service and routine procedures by about 20 percent. The 11 communities that Hilltown serves lie in one of the state’s most deficient regions. The only community health center in a 600 mile radius, Hilltown serves more than 10,000 residents annually.
- Attleboro Public Schools – to expand care to underserved children in the city through a school-based dental health program. This new initiative will eventually eliminate the need for parents to drive to neighboring communities for pediatric dentist visits, which often means missing work.
- Great Brook Valley Health Center – to expand service to special populations, including public school students, HIV/AIDS patients and immigrant families. The

grant will also increase capacity for 1,000 people on the waiting list for first appointments.

- Whittier Street Health Center – to expand coverage to uninsured and underinsured, low-income patients living with HIV/AIDS, particularly Black and Latino men and women who disproportionately suffer from HIV.
- Children’s Health Program – to establish an Oral Health Clinic in South Berkshire County, increasing the capacity for nearly 2,000 visits in the first year, and a projected 5,600 by the third year.
- Island Health – to launch the Vineyard Smiles initiative, a program that will increase oral health care outreach, education, prevention and disease management to low-to-moderate income children in Dukes County on Martha’s Vineyard.
- Upham’s Corner Health Committee – to provide a portable dental chair and dental care tools to increase access to preventive, comprehensive and specialty oral health care for elderly clients who cannot easily travel to the clinic.
- Codman Square Health Center – to upgrade the records system, thereby increasing the efficiency of its dental practice by 20 percent. The Center will also purchase mobile dental equipment to provide oral health care to elementary and public school children.
- Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center – to upgrade the Center’s record system in order to improve efficiency and provide significantly greater access to preventative oral health services.
- Community Health Connection – to expand access to underserved residents of North Central Massachusetts by 10 to 15 percent. The increased capacity will directly benefit the low-income populations of Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner, Winchendon, Templeton, Ashburnham and Westminster.
- Dorchester House – to improve the Center’s medical record system, thereby increasing capacity and improving the efficiency of the dental practice by 20 percent.

“We are supporting a new era in oral health care by bringing services to the patient – at school, work or in the heart of the community” Fuccillo said. “ Too many children and adults are suffering from severe mouth pain – when access to simple treatments and procedures could eliminate these conditions Fuccillo continues, “As we make progress in treating these current problems, we then need to focus our efforts and our resources on the social, economic, and educational factors involved in poor oral health.”

Recent studies have shown that a lack of routine oral health care severely impacts overall health and well being for children and adults, making it difficult or impossible to go to work or school. More than 51 million school hours and 164 million work hours are lost each year due to oral health problems. Access to dental care and periodic oral

examinations are the key to preventing oral diseases, as many oral problems can be detected early and/or prevented, according to the report.

The Oral Health Foundation was established in 2000 by Dental Service of Massachusetts to improve the oral health of underserved communities in Massachusetts through programs that increase access to high quality preventive oral health services. The Foundation reaches vulnerable populations through its grants to community-based organizations that provide preventive oral health services and promote the importance of preventive oral health through collaborative, community-wide awareness programs, such as the Watch Your Mouth Campaign.

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