

# Partnering to Improve Access to Oral Health in Ohio

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*Through Strategic Grantmaking and Collaboration*

November 2013



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WE MET AND TALKED ABOUT WHAT EACH OF US THOUGHT THE CHALLENGES WERE WITH GRANTEE SUSTAINABILITY, *said Theresa Wukusick, Executive Director, HealthPath Foundation*, AND WE WANTED TO REACH OUT MORE. THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS, WE CAME UP WITH SOLUTIONS AND IMPLEMENTED THEM BROADLY.

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GOOD THINGS CAN HAPPEN WHEN THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS--WHICH IS MADE MORE INTERESTING WHEN THE PARTS ARE THREE CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS AND A GOVERNMENT AGENCY, WITH UNIQUE FUNDING STRATEGIES AND GRANTMAKING APPROACHES.



For over a decade, the HealthPath Foundation of Ohio (HPF-Ohio), the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations (OHF), the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton (SCF-Canton) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) have invested in multiple strategies to move forward their shared goal of improving oral health and removing barriers to dental care for low-income and other vulnerable Ohioans. Early investments primarily included care coordination and safety net dental clinic grants, white papers on access to dental care, and the first Access to Dental Care Summit in 2001. Building upon the 2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America and the Ohio Director of Health's Task Force on Access to Dental Care, the 2001 Summit increased awareness, encouraged local action and advocacy, facilitated networking, and catalyzed new partnerships. A significant result was the formation of Ohio's first statewide oral health coalition, the Ohio Coalition for Oral Health.

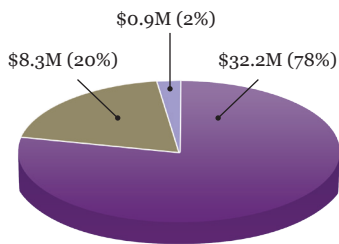
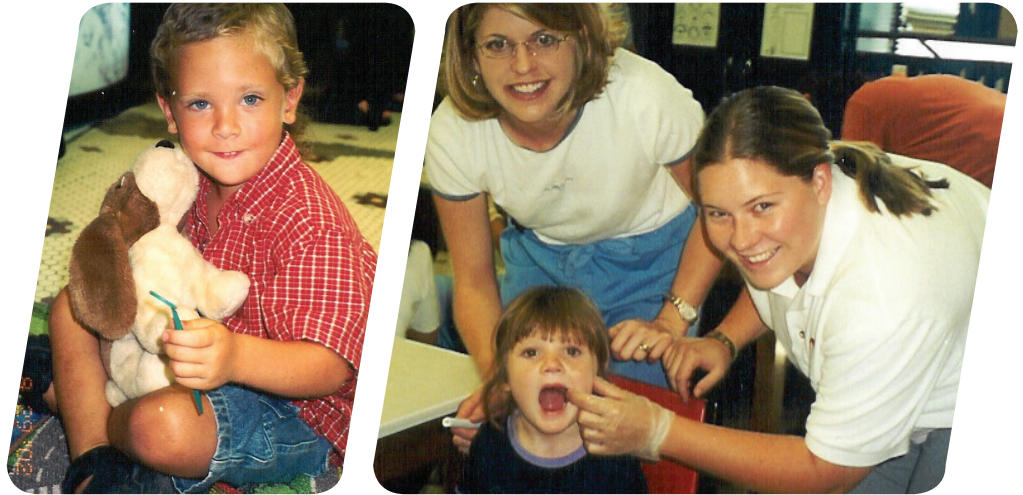
In 2006, after several years of informal cooperation, their efforts matured into a collaborative partnership, termed the Oral Health Capacity

Building (OHCB) group to better address the persistent problem of access to dental care. Together, the funding partners advanced a multi-pronged effort built on the strengths of the safety net and the passion of advocates for Ohio's vulnerable populations by:

- **Inter-Professional Education and Training:** Training healthcare workers and paraprofessionals to assist low-income families in overcoming obstacles to receiving dental care and to provide direct preventive oral health services;
- **Sustainable System of Care:** Building the capacity of the dental care safety net; and
- **Advocacy & Convening:** Bringing people together to build strong networks.

Since 2000, the funding partners have awarded grants totaling over \$41 million to organizations and agencies, but Ohio's low-income families have been the true beneficiaries of this unique private-public partnership of three charitable foundations and a state agency.

The percent of Ohio third grade children with untreated dental disease dropped from 26% in



### Collaborative Funding Since 2000

- Sustainable System of Care
- Inter-Professional Education & Training
- Advocacy and Convening

1998-99 to 19% in 2009-10. Nevertheless, even with the additional infrastructure that has resulted from the funding and efforts of the partnership, oral health remains the number one unmet health need of all children and low-income adults in Ohio. Though the collaborative efforts have been successful on several oral health related issues, there is still work to be done to improve oral health and access to dental care for Ohio's vulnerable families.

All of the programs created and funded by the partners have evolved over the years, much like the relationships between the partners and with local agencies and organizations.

## INTER-PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Early on, the funders recognized the value of integrating dental care coordination into systems that serve low-income children and adults. Since 1997, the ODH has partnered with the Ohio Dental Association on the **Ohio Partnership To Improve Oral Health Through Needed Services (OPTIONS)** program of care coordination, having helped approximately 84,000 people, primarily adults, receive dental care. The foundation partners provided funding and shared educational opportunities with OPTIONS. In total, 43 care coordination programs have been supported, including the Oral Health & Education Case Management program (OHF, HPF-Ohio) and the Bethlehem Project (SCF-Canton) to provide low-income populations with education and assist with navigating the multiple barriers they face to obtaining care. Most recently, the Bethlehem Project was offered to children and their families enrolled in the SPARK kindergarten readiness program in Stark County. During monthly home visits, caregivers learn about good nutrition and oral health behaviors, how to establish a dental home, and how to be their child's oral health teacher. Project staff schedule dental appointments, teach families what to expect at the dental visit, and follow up with appointment reminders—resulting in an impressive 10% no-show rate for dental appointments. Approximately 20 private practice dentists partner with the Bethlehem Project in providing free dental treatment to eligible participants.

With proper early care and treatment, most cavities can be prevented. In 2004, the Ohio Department of Health worked with the Bethlehem Project developers to create an online oral health training program, modeled after the Help Me Grow curriculum, for





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WE TRIED TO UNDERSTAND ORAL HEALTH CARE FROM NOT ONLY THE CONSUMER SIDE, BUT ALSO THE PROVIDER SIDE. THAT'S WHY CARE COORDINATION IS SO IMPORTANT AND SUCCESSFUL. ULTIMATELY, POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE ARE WHAT'S GOING TO MOVE THE NEEDLE. *Said Dawn Miller, Bethlehem Project Director/Program Officer, Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton.*

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WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT MISSIONS AND DIFFERENT SERVICE AREAS, BUT WE ALL BELIEVED THAT ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE COULD BEST BE IMPROVED THROUGH COLLABORATION, *said Terri Donlin Huesman, Vice President, Programs, Osteopathic Heritage Foundations.*

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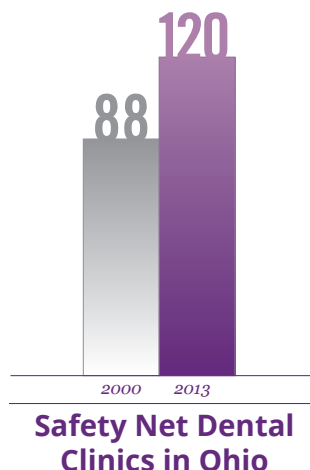
More than **22,000** low-income children received decay preventing fluoride varnish treatments.

home visitors, Early Head Start workers and others called Help Me Smile. And in 2006, ODH, in collaboration with Georgetown University, launched Smiles For Ohio, a free, web-based curriculum for primary care physicians interested in providing oral health assessments and fluoride varnish treatments for young children enrolled in Medicaid. Then, in 2007, HPF-Ohio funded the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers to implement the Early Childhood Oral Health program to provide training, educational materials, dental kits, and reimbursements for fluoride varnish treatments (a proven cavity preventer) to children aged 9-36 months, in Community Health Centers. More than 22,000 low-income children had fluoride varnish applied to their teeth. HPF-Ohio's pioneering work with the fluoride varnish program provided a roadmap for other primary caregivers to implement similar programs.

## SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM OF CARE: CLINICAL CARE & CAPACITY BUILDING

### *Increasing the Number and Building the Capacity of Safety Net Dental Clinics*

From 2000-2013, the partners invested over \$30 million (more than 60 grants), in the start-up, expansion or renovation of both fixed and mobile safety net dental clinics across the state. A number of clinics leveraged one partner's funding with another's or federal dollars. These invest-



ments spurred a 36% increase in the number of safety net dental clinics in Ohio during that time period. More than 40% of clinics operating in 2013 have used grants from one or more of the partner funders, to serve tens of thousands of low-income children and adults.

### *Building Capacity to be Self-Sustaining*

All partners' funding approaches evolved as a result of their collaborative efforts. Many of the clinics that received their grants still struggled with sustainability, rarely able to strike the proper balance of public service mission and business operations. Under the leadership of the HPF-Ohio, the Oral Health Capacity Building Project was launched to help safety net dental clinics develop efficient, sustainable delivery models that maximized revenue, enhanced productivity and quality of clinic care.

The Oral Health Capacity Building Project included three phases:

- an assessment of clinic operations by an independent consultant;
- the development of a performance improvement plan; and
- the potential for a subsequent implementation grant based on the plan.

A publicly available resource for capacity building information is [OhioDentalClinics.com](http://OhioDentalClinics.com). The website was launched by the ODH with funding support from the HPF-Ohio, and developed in collaboration with Georgetown University's National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center. [OhioDentalClinics.com](http://OhioDentalClinics.com) is a comprehensive online portal that includes distance learning, operational manuals, and



**25** grantee organizations have received technical assistance and funding through the Oral Health Capacity Building Project.



other tools necessary to start and maintain the delivery of health care services in safety net dental clinics in Ohio. HPF-Ohio and the ODH funded new content development for the Safety Net Dental Clinic Manual, a featured link on the site.

### *Dental Residency Programs*

Along the way, the partners have indirectly supported residency programs to train general dentists, by granting funds for the safety net dental clinics of some hospital-based training programs. For example, in 2007, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton helped directly fund the Mercy Medical Center General Practice Residency Program to service a five-county area.

Most recently the HPF-Ohio became the primary funder of grants to establish the Lutheran Medical Center's Advanced Education in General Dentistry Residency Program at several Ohio clinics. They brought a local foundation partner, Interact for Health (formerly the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati), to the table to fund additional clinics. Lutheran Medical Center's program is beneficial for clinics that are able to help educate young dentists, as they retain revenue from the patient care the residents provide. Potential benefits include the retention of program graduates at safety net clinics or as private practitioners in underserved areas. The funders view this approach as a dentist workforce pipeline for high-need areas. Lutheran Medical Center hopes to expand the program in Ohio.

## **ADVOCACY & CONVENING: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO BUILD STRONG NETWORKS**

### *Advocacy: Systems Change*

The funding partners helped influence the presence of a voice for the oral health needs of Ohio's vulnerable populations. In 2001, at the statewide Access to Dental Care Summit the grassroots volunteer-operated Ohio Coalition for Oral Health (OCOH) was conceived. Early advocacy efforts by OCOH helped influence the State to continue Medicaid coverage for adult dental care. Then in 2010, based on a recommendation made by the 2009 Director of Health's Task Force on Oral Health and Access to Dental Care, OCOH was succeeded by the professionally-staffed Children's Oral Health Action Team (COHAT). Foundation funding (HPF-Ohio, SCF) supported the creation of COHAT which continues



to serve as a convener and advocate for improving access to oral health care. COHAT, under the management of Voices for Ohio's Children, a nonpartisan collaborative, received a grant to be the lead agency and facilitator of the statewide network, which now includes a diverse array of 30-plus organizations that are well versed in children's oral health policy and/or have a key stake in improving children's oral health in Ohio. The Ohio Association of Community Health Centers, which operated the previously mentioned ECOH program, is active in COHAT. Collectively, the partner's worked with Ohio Medicaid resulting in their decision to allow primary caregivers to receive payment for providing fluoride varnish applications. COHAT's policy agenda is supported by the Ohio Dental Association, the Ohio Dental Hygienists Association, the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers and other safety net dental clinic representatives.

### *Convenings: local, regional and statewide*

Passionate people coming together can result in remarkable outcomes. The funding partners have initiated, funded and participated in the oral health task forces and summits in which providers, advocates and funders from around the state shared learnings and opportunities to improve access to care. These types of convenings were unheard of in Ohio prior to 2000. Convening oral health stakeholders has been a key strategy in addressing access to oral health care in Ohio that has resulted in three oral health summits, four high-level oral health task forces (with a fifth now being planned), the 2006 Open Space Technology and Advisory Committee processes that launched the OHCB project, and other foundation-supported convenings of safety net dental clinic providers for training and to build upon one another's experiences. The result has been the development of a strong, supportive network that spans the state.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

This report summarizes over thirteen years of intentional and evolving effort. It is about the power of working together to shed more light on a crucial healthcare issue. It is also about the power of collaborating to leverage community assets. While the accomplishments in this report may have been assisted by the four featured funding partners they represent the work of local agencies and organizations, many of which have been grantees, and the many local and national foundations partnering with Ohio funders to make investments in various initiatives. Foundation funding alone, however, cannot sustain the dental care safety net. Oral health stubbornly remains the number one unmet healthcare need of all Ohio children and low-income adults.

The Affordable Care Act offers hope for reducing the number of consumers lacking adequate dental insurance but will not reach its potential without the efforts of oral health advocates and dental care providers, including safety net clinics. Systematic change is needed to address the level of Medicaid reimbursement rates and challenges in recruiting and retaining dentists to practice in safety net clinics and treat the poor and underserved. Without such change, the ability of safety net dental clinics in Ohio to keep their doors open will continue to be challenged. If these clinics close—and some have—who will fill the gap?

And still, good things can happen when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY IMPROVED THE OPERATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF MANY DENTAL SAFETY NETS IN OHIO THROUGH OUR COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS, *said Ramona Taylor, Oral Health Access Program Coordinator for the Ohio Department of Health.*



Since 2000, the funding partners have awarded grants totaling over **\$41** million to organizations and agencies.

## FUNDING PARTNERS



### *HealthPath Foundation of Ohio (HPF-Ohio)*

The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio (formerly the Anthem Foundation of Ohio) focuses its grantmaking on three areas of need: Oral Health, Family Violence Prevention, and Strengthening Ohio's Safety Net. It encourages positive change by funding direct services, nonprofit capacity building, and policy work at the state and local level. Founded in 1999, HPF-Ohio is a supporting organization of The Greater Cincinnati Foundation.



### *Ohio Department of Health (ODH)*

The Ohio Department of Health works with 130 local health departments and has approximately 150 programs, including the state Oral Health program. The state Oral Health program has four goals: communities will have access to oral disease prevention programs; individuals will have access to dental care; oral health data and information will be available to communities and policy-makers; and public policy in Ohio will include oral health as an essential component of health.



### *Osteopathic Heritage Foundations (OHF)*

The Osteopathic Heritage Foundation and the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville (the Foundations) support community health and quality of life programs in central and southeastern Ohio as well as advance, on a local and national scope, osteopathic medicine, medical research and osteopathic medical education.



### *Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton (SCF-Canton)*

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton addresses the needs of the poor and underserved by understanding the root causes of poverty, nurturing the growth of healthy communities, emphasizing youth and family, and measuring the outcomes of these efforts. In addition to its responsive grantmaking, SCF-Canton also has initiated programs in the areas of Quality Child Care, Oral Health, and Prescription Assistance.

#### ENDNOTES:

<sup>i</sup> Preventive Oral Health Care in The Anthem Foundation of Ohio's Service Area. The Anthem Foundation of Ohio (now HPF-Ohio). Available at: <https://www.healthfoundation.org/docs/Preventive%20Oral%20Health.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Access to Dental Care in Ohio, 2000. The Ohio Department of Health & Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Available at: <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/access2000-allsectionscombined.ashx>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/SurgeonGeneral/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/recommendationsofthedirectorofhealthtaskforceonaccesstodentalcare-november302000.ashx>

<sup>v</sup> Oral Health isn't Optional: A Report on Ohioans' Oral Health and Access to Dental Care, 2011. Ohio Department of Health. [http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/ohioreport8\\_9.ashx](http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/ohioreport8_9.ashx)

<sup>vi</sup> [http://prodauth.odh.ohio.gov/sitecore/shell/Controls/Rich%20Text%20Editor//~/media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/dtffinalreport11\\_04.ashx](http://prodauth.odh.ohio.gov/sitecore/shell/Controls/Rich%20Text%20Editor//~/media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral%20health/dtffinalreport11_04.ashx)





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