

Funding Program: Partners in Program Planning for Adolescent Health  
Project Title: Awesome Smiles: Integrating Oral Health in Adolescent Health and Positive Youth Development  
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### **Project purpose**

“Awesome Smiles,” the oral health component of “Partners in Program Planning for Adolescent Health,” addressed the problems of adolescent oral health inattention and lack of integration within the dental and public health communities by engaging the dental community and partnering with other provider groups. Component problems addressed include the lack of (1) information on adolescent oral health; (2) organizational infrastructure and programming within and between dental organizations; and (3) inter-professional activity, public awareness, and policymaker action on adolescent oral health.

### **Project goals and objectives**

#### **GOAL 1: Promote awareness, information and programming on adolescent oral health and positive youth development (AOH/PYD) across a spectrum of dental organizations.**

Objective 1: Develop and disseminate authoritative information that is relevant and accessible to providers and policymakers.

Objective 2: Establish sustainable infrastructure on AOH/PYD within dental organizations.

Objective 3: Institutionalize a coalition of dental groups and policy/resource centers to promote programming on AOH/PYD.

#### **GOAL 2: Actively integrate oral health in the work of other professional groups that address the needs of adolescents.**

Objective 1: Enhance integration of oral health into systems of care serving adolescents through communication, shared expertise, joint education and training, and integrated programming.

Objective 2: Leverage the adolescent component of the AAPD Foundation’s education campaign on oral health by targeting non-dental providers as well as the public.

#### **GOAL 3: Reduce oral health and dental care disparities among adolescents.**

Objective 1: Engage dental coalition in addressing Healthy People 2010 “critical objectives for adolescents” and “oral health objectives.”

Objective 2: Engage dental coalition in promoting and utilization of SCHIP by eligible teens.

Objective 3: Engage dental coalition in informing and improving public policies and clinical policies that hold potential to reduce disparities.

**GOAL 4: Collaborate with Maternal and Child Health Bureau's Office of Adolescent Health to promote its Title V missions and key strategies including building a data and information base; improving state infrastructure; identifying and replicating best practices, policies, and partners; improving insurance coverage; and encouraging positive youth development.**

Objectives: Continuously refine this project through (1) rigorous evaluation (2) responsiveness to MCHB/OAH interests and guidance.

**Project activities**

AAPD added "adolescent" to their description of their patient base, formed the Committee on the Adolescent to oversee the program, and conducted two adolescent oral health symposia at the annual AAPD conference. AAPD also revised the Guidelines for Adolescent Health with support from PIPPAH Partner and HRSA publications, and formed a Dental Coalition, comprising over twenty national dental professional and public health organizations, which agreed to promote adolescent oral health and positive youth development; the coalition also adopted the AMCHP/SAHCN publication "A Conceptual Framework for Adolescent Health" for a guiding definition of adolescence.

The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) implemented the School and Adolescent Oral Health Committee, which called for collaboration with the Awesome Smiles project, and began discussions with the State Adolescent Health Coordinators network.

Awesome Smiles information was distributed at National Oral Health Conferences from 2002-2005; at a series of roundtable presentations at the 2005 National Oral Health Conference; at AAPD's annual conferences; and at numerous HRSA/MCHB conferences and forums. AAPD and CDHP collaborated on a pilot study on Pediatric Dental Office Policies Regarding Adolescent Patients, and presented the findings at the 2004 National Oral Health Conference.

While Awesome Smiles generated interest in the dental community, convincing the oral health community that adolescent behaviors can present a new set of threats to oral health remained difficult, owing in large part to the lack of research.

**Coordination**

Awesome Smiles benefited greatly from face-to-face PIPPAH Partner meetings in Washington, DC, which facilitated a number of important collaborations. With the American Bar Association (ABA), AAPD contributed oral health information to the their "Judges' Guide on Health for Teens in Care." Also with ABA, the Awesome Smiles project provided technical expertise to a two-day workshop at the ABA's 11<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Children and the Law. With the American Dietetic Association, the Awesome Smiles project collaborated to produce a presentation on obesity and oral health at the 2005 AAPD Annual Session.

Awesome Smiles project staff provided consulting services and technical support to the Children's Hospital National Medical Center (CNMC) Dental Department and TASA (Teens Against the Spread of AIDS program), helping them develop a proposal to fund an adolescent oral health project. The proposal received an AETNA Foundation regional health disparities grant, which helped develop an effective referral system for adolescents who need dental health services and are too old for the Children's Hospital program.

CDHP and AAPD also worked with AMCHP to start a dialogue between the State Adolescent Health Coordinators and the network of State Dental Directors. AAPD and CDHP also entered into discussions with leadership at the Centers for Disease Control and prevention on introducing a specific adolescent oral health objective into the NIAH 21 Critical Objectives.

While the Dental Coalition organizations were engaged at the outset, many of the organizations were understandably concerned with their own strategic plans, and it was difficult to maintain a focus on adolescent health at the decision-making level in most of the organizations. Consequently, the Awesome Smiles project focused on two key organizations – the grantee (AAPD) and the state dental director organization (ASTDD) – to be models for the rest of the Dental Coalition in creating an institutional focus on adolescents. AAPD and ASTDD made significant progress in focusing on adolescent oral health, through dedicated committees and multiple professional learning opportunities. The scope of organizational change requires that small gains be made, which take much time in working with organizational bureaucracies. The dental community's lack of data on adolescent oral health played into the difficulty of making long-term organizational change across the Dental Coalition. The adolescent oral health literature review, the foundation for a renewed focus on adolescent research, also experienced barriers in completion, as it has been difficult to report on trends and clinical data without specific studies in the peer-reviewed literature.

### **Publications and products**

Awesome Smiles developed a logo, included in 15,000 CDHP brochures, as well as on the AAPD and CDHP Web sites, on publications developed by CDHP including fact sheets, and the CDHP exhibit, which features the ongoing AAPD/CDHP collaboration in programs and advocacy. The Awesome Smiles project gained a substantial online presence at CDHP's Web site, with links to PIPPAH Partners and Dental Coalition organizations.

The project also developed of and disseminated News\*Bytes, a bi-weekly email "clipping service" that identifies the latest information on child and adolescent oral health access and how that information is presented to the general public through the news media.

AAPD extensively revised their Adolescent Guidelines and integrated PIPPAH-Partner adolescent information along with Positive Youth Development. Dental Clinics of North America published a journal edition specifically on Adolescent Oral Health. Edited by

the Vice-Chair of AAPD's Committee on the Adolescent, the acknowledgements cite Awesome Smiles as a driving force behind the volume.

### **Dissemination and utilization of results and products**

AAPD's Committee on the Adolescent has the professional authority to develop policies and guidelines, and in fact completed such a review in its first year of existence. With support from Awesome Smiles, ASTDD, the professional association for state dental public health personnel, has initiated and grown its school health committee, with a focus on adolescents. CDHP compiled online information from 12 Dental Coalition organizations and contributed the information to the NIAH 21 Critical Objectives matrix, in addition to organizational membership information for the "companion document" promotion matrix. The matrix listing of dental resource information included recommendations, policy statements, poster and PowerPoint presentations, initiatives, public health campaigns, policy and clinical guidelines, issue briefs and fact sheets, publications and Web-based materials.

### **Evaluation**

While policies and guidelines at a number of dental coalition organizations were slow to materialize due to changing priorities and key staffing changes, two strategic groups made great progress in institutionalizing adolescent oral health and positive youth development in their governance and programming. The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors' (ASTDD) School and Adolescent Oral Health Committee approached completion of State Profiles for School and Adolescent Oral Health, as well as solidifying the Committee's charges and ongoing work plan. In addition, the AAPD Committee on the Adolescent became a fully functioning group, capable of independent action while relying on the wealth of resources offered by the PIPPAH Project. AAPD's symposium on adolescent oral health held in 2005 paved the way for additional, similar symposiums in the coming years. CDHP's monitoring of and technical assistance for these two committees was time-intensive to start; with these successes, it is clear that these committees are functioning on their own, and further technical assistance can be given to other key dental coalition organizations as they embark on institutionalizing Awesome Smiles into their work plans.

While additional organizations have been slow to fully incorporate AOH/PYD, this does not mean they are ignoring the project. Another key organization – the American Association of Orthodontists – continued to pledge its support of the Awesome Smiles program.

The inability to conduct both a major continuing education session and a dental coalition meeting in Year 4 resulted in a setback in regard to building widespread support for adolescents within the dental profession. Face-to-face PIPPAH Partner meetings and opportunities to work with other organizations continued to be of prime value in sharing information and promoting the Awesome Smiles project.

### **Project impact, future plans and sustainability**

Awesome Smiles was able to produce great successes in the first five years, but not without challenges. Without HRSA/MCHB investment through the PIPPAH initiative, which made the Awesome Smiles project possible, these challenges may not have been addressed for a long while, if at all.

The project's greatest impact has been on AAPD and ASTDD, organizations which invested committee action in a focus adolescent oral health. Critical and vital impact was also made on the National Initiative to Improve Adolescent Health, which started out minus a focus on oral health as there was no measurable HP 2010 dental objective in the 21 Critical Objectives. Through ongoing, consistent work by both the Awesome Smiles staff and the leadership of NIIAH, adolescent oral health is now included in the NIIAH logic model, and continues to be important to a number of former and current PIPPAH Partners.

It is important to note that, without funding, it is difficult to continue all of any project's goals and objectives as fully as when it had funding, and Awesome Smiles is no exception. However, through five years of steady collaboration and capacity building, Awesome Smiles made a significant and important contribution toward making adolescent oral health and positive youth development an integral part of key dental organizations, PIPPAH Partners, HRSA/MCHB, and the medical community.

The dental community's involvement, through CDHP, in the Institute of Medicine's Committee on Adolescent Health Care is one very important benefit of the Awesome Smiles project, and provides a sustained activity that continues on after the project ended. Awesome Smiles project staff was first made aware of this committee through one of the final PIPPAH Partner meetings, and noticed that the IOM committee had not yet included a focus on oral health. Project staff suggested to IOM staff that Dr. Burton Edelstein, founding director and board chair of CDHP, be considered for the committee, and soon afterwards he was confirmed for the project. Dr. Edelstein continues to bring a focus on adolescent oral health to this important national committee.

AAPD's Committee on the Adolescent continues to develop materials, review research, plan continuing education sessions, and consult with additional AAPD committees to ensure that the focus on adolescent oral health begun by the Awesome Smiles project continues. The committee has an extensive plan for programming and communication on adolescent oral health in collaboration with pediatric dentists and past and current PIPPAH Partners.

AAPD was asked by a current PIPPAH Partner (the American College of Preventive Medicine) to be a part of their ongoing medical coalition.

ASTDD's School and Adolescent Oral Health Committee also continues to build partnerships to integrate oral health in school and adolescent health, and to collaborate on efforts to improve the general health of school age children and adolescents.