

**PROVIDING DENTAL HOMES
FOR HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START CHILDREN**

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY
HEALTHY SMILES, HEALTHY CHILDREN: THE FOUNDATION OF THE AAPD
JOHNSON & JOHNSON, INC.**

Every child deserves a healthy start on life, but when it comes to oral health many children face significant challenges. Children in low-income families tend to have higher rates of tooth decay, which often starts in the first year or two of life, and have greater difficulty accessing ongoing basic dental care. Some key points that highlight the severity of the problem include:

- Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease – five times more common than asthma – and the #1 unmet health care need among Head Start children.
- 28% of all preschoolers between the ages of two and five suffer from tooth decay, but decay rates often range from 30%-40% of three year old and 50%-60% of four year olds in Head Start programs.
- Dental care) for children in Head Start generally is covered by Medicaid, however dentists' dissatisfaction with Medicaid programs often results in low levels of dentist participation and limited access to comprehensive dental care for Head Start children.

Challenges that Head Start programs face in securing access to quality dental care stem from a number of factors, including:

- Reluctance by many general dentists to provide services for preschool-age children;
- Dentists' lack of familiarity with HS/EHS program goals, objectives and resources;
- Dentists' lack of familiarity with the oral health care needs of HS/EHS children;
- Limited dentist involvement with local Head Start health advisory committees, and the resultant paucity of local HS/EHS 'dental champions'; and
- Limited knowledge on the part of some Head Start programs and dentists about contemporary, evidence-based pediatric dental approaches.

The AAPD is partnering with the Office of Head Start (OHS) to provide dental homes to young children who may otherwise go without care. OHS has awarded a five-year, ten-million dollar contract to AAPD to establish dental homes for approximately 1 million children across America. A "dental home" means that

each child's oral health care is delivered in a comprehensive, continuously accessible, coordinated and family-centered way by a licensed dentist.

Johnson & Johnson has supplemented this funding with a generous \$600,000 sponsorship through Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children: The Foundation of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

The new contract calls for AAPD to develop a national network of pediatric dentists and general dentists to provide quality dental homes for Head Start and Early Head Start children; train teams of dentists and Head Start personnel in optimal oral health care practices; and assist Head Start programs in obtaining comprehensive services to meet the full range of Head Start children's oral health needs. The AAPD-OHS collaboration also will help provide parents, caregivers and Head Start staff with the latest evidence-based information on how they can help prevent tooth decay and establish a foundation for a lifetime of oral health.

The five-year plan relies on five key components:

- Providing project leadership, administration and organizational support;
- Providing oral health expertise and technical assistance;
- Developing networks of dentists to provide access to dental homes;
- Training dentists to enhance their capability to meet the oral health needs of young children and their understanding of HS/EHS programs; and
- Enhancing HS/EHS oral health staff training and parent education programs.