



Delta Dental of Minnesota

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Delta Dental of Minnesota Sponsors Oral Health Track of the Head Start Region V Training Institute

First time Head Start implements oral health track at conference

October 26, 2007 (EAGAN, Minn.) – Delta Dental of Minnesota sponsored the first-ever oral health track of the Head Start Association Region V Training Institute. The Region V conference included over 1200 attendees from six states, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. Delta Dental of Minnesota and Head Start utilized this conference to expand the importance of understanding oral health to families in a broader geographic area.

Delta Dental of Minnesota and Minnesota Head Start Association collaborated to educate Head Start teachers, assistants and parents on primary oral health prevention. This helps reinforce the important link between oral health and overall physical well-being. Head Start helps change the way families think about oral health and helps families understand that modifying behaviors can have a long-standing impact on the entire family's oral health.

“We are not just funding services,” said Ann Johnson, director of Community Affairs at Delta Dental of Minnesota. “This important partnership expands what we’ve learned in Minnesota into six states. We are trying to prevent dental caries from happening in the first place and the best place to start that process is in the home.”

“Children are now being seen by Head Start home health visitors who are trained to identify oral health issues before they develop into something more significant,” said Gayle Kelly, executive director of the Minnesota Head Start Association.

In addition to funding the oral health track, Delta Dental of Minnesota, through its philanthropic endeavors, funded four out of the five oral health projects at the conference.

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Those four projects were:

- **Head Start/Early Head Start program staff providing primary dental caries (tooth decay) prevention to high-risk children – Presented by Dr. Amos Deinard, MD, MPH - Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota.** Dental caries, which as an infectious disease, is a silent epidemic that is preventable. The session trained Head Start/Early Head Start staff about dental caries causes, prevention and the role the staff can play in providing primary caries preventive services to enrollees, including applications of fluoride varnish.
- **Supporting oral health needs of children with special needs – Presented by Christine Bentley, Director of The Fraser Institute.** The presentation demonstrated My Healthy Smile interactive CD-Rom, which helps children with special needs reduce anxiety during dental visits. The CD is specifically targeted to children, parents and dental professionals.
- **How to talk tooth in West Central Minnesota: Focusing on young children’s oral health – Presented by Nancy Jost, EC initiative coordinator at West Central Initiative; Becky Lommen, dental hygienist and oral health consultant.** The Early Childhood Dental Network is a nine-county, multi-disciplinary, collaborative project designed to increase awareness and education to all children and their caregivers about the importance of oral health and to increase access to dental care, specifically to children ages 0 to 5 who are underserved or uninsured.
- **Culturally targeted oral care for the Head Start community – Presented by Natalie Kaweckyi, RDH, and clinic manager, Children’s Dental Services.** Methods were presented for culturally targeting oral health treatment, outreach and education to the young child. The presentation also discussed communication barriers, working with interpreters, and recognizing cultural and religious observances.

Minnesota Head Start is a federally and state funded child and family development program, helping low-income families become self-reliant while also helping prepare their children for school success. Knowing that a majority of Head Start children have problems accessing oral health prevention and treatment, which affects their ability to grow in language and literacy, in 2003 the Minnesota Head Start Association and its stakeholders completed a Statewide Oral Health Action Plan and has been implementing innovative approaches to oral health since then. For more information on Minnesota Head Start, visit www.mnheadstart.org

Delta Dental of Minnesota is an independently operated, nonprofit dental services company that administers self-insured and prepaid dental service plans. Delta Dental serves more than 8,300 employer groups with more than 3.2 million members in Minnesota and across the nation.

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Delta Dental of Minnesota's oral health education, community outreach and philanthropic program focuses primarily in the area of oral health education and prevention. Other major initiatives under this program include supporting Children's Dental Services, a nonprofit agency providing accessible dental care through clinic and school-based settings and education to more than 11,000 uninsured and underinsured Minnesota children, and funding Head Start's Oral Health Risk Assessment program, a grassroots effort to raise awareness on the importance of oral health and oral disease prevention targeting 30,000 Minnesota families. Delta Dental of Minnesota is headquartered in Eagan, and has a customer service center on Minnesota's Iron Range. For more information about Delta Dental of Minnesota, visit www.deltadentalmn.org.

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