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Delta Dental of Minnesota Partners with Head Start for Third Successive Year on Grassroots, Statewide Oral Health Education Campaign For Kids

Organization has donated more than \$250,000 to outreach program

EAGAN, Minn. (June 12, 2006) – Tooth decay is a serious problem for children, with almost half of the U.S. population under 15 years of age being affected with dental caries — most of which are preventable through good oral hygiene and early intervention. To help alleviate the issue for Minnesota’s children, Delta Dental of Minnesota (Delta Dental) is partnering for the third consecutive year with Minnesota’s Head Start Oral Health Risk Assessment program, a grass-roots effort to raise awareness on the importance of oral health and oral disease prevention. Delta Dental has donated more than \$250,000 to the Head Start program since 2004.

The Oral Health Risks Assessment program, which is in its third year, provides training for existing Head Start Home Health Visitors to identify oral disease at an early stage, and educate families on the importance of maintaining oral health and preventing oral disease. In its first two years, the program reached more than 30,000 families.

“Early intervention in children is absolutely critical to helping them maintain good oral health,” said Ann Johnson, director of community affairs for Delta Dental. “The key with any educational effort is to make an impact. This grass-roots effort allows us to get into the homes of thousands of Minnesota families and do one-on-one oral health awareness with parents. We are pleased the program has been such a tremendous success.”

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The training for Head Start Home Health Visitors includes the following:

- ✓ Fundamentals of tooth development, the important role of baby teeth,
- ✓ Dental disease transmission (typically unsuspecting parents directly transmit the bacteria to their children),
- ✓ Information on healthy behaviors, including diet and beverages, including appropriate baby bottle usage,
- ✓ Establishment of a daily oral health routine,
- ✓ Culturally appropriate resources to address health disparities,
- ✓ Performing basic oral examinations,
- ✓ The Tooth Book – an easy-to-read guide for parents and children on oral health.

“Children are now being seen by home 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. “We are also seeing children in Head Start visiting the dentist at a much earlier age, which allows dentists to recognize decay and other oral health issues before they develop into something more extreme. We can directly attribute the earlier dental visits to the substantive oral health training and outreach.”

Originally, the training was designed only for Early Head Start (birth to three years of age) from select regions of the state, however, as a result of the success of the program in its first two years in increased education, healthy behavior change and dental visits, Head Start expanded the program by offering it to all Head Start Home Health Visitors (birth to five years of age). In addition, the training was offered to community health workers and other professionals in home, school and community clinic settings.

The program also partnered with the Minnesota Children with Special Health Needs (a unit within the Minnesota Department of Health) and dental consultants from the University of Minnesota and Marquette University.

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“We are truly grateful for the financial support that Delta Dental has provided,” said Kelly. “Their generous support is helping us spread the message to Head Start families and the greater Head Start community about the importance of good oral health.”

The Oral Health Risk Assessment program was funded as part of Delta Dental’s overall oral health education, community outreach and philanthropic program, which is focused primarily in the area of oral health education and prevention. Other 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.

About Delta Dental of Minnesota

An innovator in oral health benefit plans, 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 8,200 employer groups with more than 3.1 million members in Minnesota and across the nation. Delta Dental of Minnesota is headquartered in Eagan, and has a customer service center on Minnesota’s Iron Range. For more information on this program or Delta Dental of Minnesota, visit www.deltadentalmn.org.

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