

**Home By One: Oral Health**  
**Oral Health and Dental Care on the Early Childhood Health Agenda**

**Summary:** Home By One has successfully brought early dental care issues to the forefront of several Connecticut initiatives dedicated to addressing early childhood health and development. In addition to HBO's direct impact on the delivery of health education through the state's WIC program, HBO has also had an impressive impact on state policy and system building to promote early childhood dental services. These efforts are discussed below.

**1) Governor's Education's Early Childhood Education Cabinet**

Governor Rell established the Early Childhood Education Cabinet in 2007 to advance the integration of services to young children and families. State agency personnel, child care providers, and child advocates serve on the Cabinet. HBO successfully brought recognition of the importance of early dental services to this high level policy group. The Cabinet's first report, *Ready by Five- Fine by Nine*, which serves as a blueprint for early childhood services in Connecticut, recognizes the role of dental health in ensuring school readiness. Specifically, the Cabinet identified the following measure as an indicator of the state's progress in ensuring that children are healthy and ready to learn upon entering Kindergarten:

"the percent of young children ages 2, 4, and 5, enrolled in HUSKY A (Connecticut's Medicaid program) who had a preventive dental visit within the previous one year period"

**2) Maternal Health Subcommittee of the Medicaid Managed Care Council**

The Medicaid Managed Care Council oversees implementation of the Department of Social Services' administration of the state's Medicaid program, HUSKY. Legislators, agency personnel, health care advocates and service providers sit on the Council. The Council also charges several subcommittees with research and policy development to improve health services for the HUSKY population. One such subcommittee is the Women's Health Subcommittee, which includes representatives from a broad array of state agencies and private organizations as well as the state's three Medicaid Managed Care plans. The Women's Health Subcommittee addresses dental health issues both in regard to pregnant women and young children. The Subcommittee's agenda expanded to include dental health issues in 2009, with presentations from HUSKY dental health staff and HBO Advisory Committee members. Based on these presentations, the Subcommittee recommended that the state pursue technical assistance grants to help CT develop an oral health social marketing campaign as well as work with families at the community level to explain the importance of oral health and provide information about service resources.

**3) Medical Home Initiative of the Title V Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) program**

With state and federal dollars, Connecticut's Medical Home Initiative supports five programs in different regions of the state to provide care coordination services through pediatric medical homes for CYSHCN. As a result of HBO's participation and engagement with the Medical Home Initiative, care coordinators throughout the state CYSHCN system are involved in linking children to dental services. The CT Family Support Network (CT FSN), the family outreach contractor for the Medical Home Initiative, sponsored a statewide conference in June 2010 addressing dental needs for CYSHCN. The program included presentations by HBO staff and consultants. Over the final year of the HBO's funding, the program will

support the CT FSN in outreach to families of CYSHCN about dental needs and linkage of CYSHCN to dental services established through over the first four years of the HBO. HBO will provide funding for a statewide dental coordinator to work as a staff member within the CT FSN to support regional CT FSN coordinators in building their capacity to help families with dental needs.

#### **4) Child Health and Development Institute's (CHDI) *Framework for Child Health Services: Support the Healthy Development and School Readiness of Connecticut's Children***

CHDI is a non-profit health policy institute dedicated to improving health and mental health systems for children in Connecticut. In 2008 CHDI received funding from Early Childhood Cabinet and three private foundations to analyze the health services system in place for Connecticut's young children and develop recommendations for improving the delivery of services to children. The resulting document, *A Framework for Child Health Services: Support the Healthy Development and School Readiness of Connecticut's Children*, highlights the critical role of health in school readiness and discusses how Connecticut can support child health services' contribution to the state's effort to ensure that children are ready to learn by age five or when they enter elementary school. CHDI developed the *Framework* with input from a variety of national child health experts as well as state stakeholders. HBO leadership participated in several aspects of the document development as well as review of the final draft. As a result, the *Framework* contains data on the dental needs of Connecticut's children as well as recommendations for incorporating dental services into pediatric medical homes.

In addition to recognizing the importance of early dental services at the policy level, and with funding from HBO, CHDI has also embarked upon an aggressive outreach initiative to child health providers. The initiative falls under CHDI's Educating Practices in the Community (EPIC) program, which uses academic detailing to provide practice-based education to pediatric and family medicine practices on a variety of child health topics. The oral health EPIC module stresses early prevention, mouth exams, and application of fluoride varnish as part of pediatric well child services. CHDI presented the oral health module in 14 practices over the HBO grant funded period.

#### **5) William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund Discovery Communities Initiative**

The William Casper Graustein Memorial Fund's Discovery initiative aims to engage communities in ensuring that "Connecticut children of all races and income levels are ready for school by age five and successful learners by age nine" (Graustein Memorial Fund: <http://discovery.wcgmf.org/>). The initiative provides grants to local communities to develop early childhood partnerships and plans for ensuring school readiness. In 2008, with funding from the Children's Fund of Connecticut, Graustein expanded the Discovery initiative to include extra dollars for communities that addressed the health of their youngest children. Fifteen communities received these supplemental funds for planning and programming in 2008 through 2012. As a result of HBO's educational and awareness raising activities, which included participation in state level meetings between the Graustein Memorial Fund, Children's Fund on Connecticut and State Department of Education, more than half of the 15 communities have dental health on their agendas.