



THE ABCD PROGRAM. ABCD focuses on expanding access to services in Washington state by providing preventive and restorative dental care to Medicaid-eligible children from birth through age 5, with the emphasis on enrollment by age one. It is based on the premise that starting dental visits early will yield positive behaviors by both parents and children, thereby helping to control the caries process and reduce the need for costly future restorative work.

HISTORY. In 1995, the first ABCD program was established in Spokane, Washington as a collaborative effort between public and private sector partners who came together to address the severe lack of dental access for high-risk preschool children. The proposed solution was the development of the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) Program. Its success has led every other Washington county (38 in all) to adopt the program and has prompted interest from many other states.

HOW WASHINGTON'S PROGRAM WORKS. ABCD is a collaborative effort of Washington Dental Service Foundation, the University of Washington School of Dentistry, the Washington Health Care Authority's Medicaid Purchasing Administration, the Washington State Dental Association, the Department of Health, local dental societies, and local health jurisdictions.

LOCAL PROGRAMS. The ABCD Program in each county is locally administered by a health jurisdiction or community agency that contracts with the state Health Care Authority's Medicaid Purchasing Administration. Local programs work with the ABCD dental champion, dental society and ABCD-participating dentists, provide active outreach to organizations in which Medicaid-eligible children receive services, identify and enroll 0-5 year olds, orient the child's family to the program, and match each child with an ABCD-certified dentist. The health department or community agency provides ongoing *case management* services to ABCD families. The program works with ABCD families who have difficulty keeping dental appointments, assuring that obstacles to care, such as lack of transportation and language barriers, are addressed.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS. The health department or local agency coordinates with community outreach agencies and others to identify and refer eligible clients. The ABCD program has been embedded in many local Head Start, Early Head Start, and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Nutrition programs, which enroll and orient their clients, and at the same time, help achieve the agency's client oral health objectives.

ABCD FAMILIES. In their program orientation, enrolled families are coached about the need for early and preventive dental care, and dental office etiquette, including the need to keep appointments. The resulting no-show rate is significantly lower than in non-ABCD practices.

DENTISTS. ABCD encourages *general dental offices* to provide a positive dental experience and a dental home by age 1. The process of identifying and recruiting general dentists to the ABCD Program begins with the support and assistance of the *local dental society*, which sponsors an initial ABCD informational meeting with local dentists and ABCD state dental leadership and subsequently promotes the program to the membership. The county's *ABCD Dental Champion*, a leading pediatric dentist (or a general dentist in areas without pediatric coverage) is selected and trained by the University of Washington to identify, recruit, train and mentor local general dentists.

More than 1600 dentists have been certified in the ABCD Program's focus on early pediatric dental techniques and preventive services by the University of Washington School of Dentistry's pediatric dentistry staff. In the training, with continuing dental education credits subsidized by the ABCD program,

the dentist and his/her team learn and practice the knee-to-knee examination procedure as a better method than using a dental chair for examining very young children. Dentists are encouraged to use atraumatic restorative technique (ART) when providing restorative therapy as a transitional method for restoring teeth in infants and toddlers.

ABCD certified dentists receive enhanced Medicaid reimbursement for selected procedures for enrolled children, including oral evaluation, family oral health education, fluoride varnish application, and certain restorative procedures. Dental front office staff receives training in communication and follow-up with the client families and the billing staff learns how to work with the Medicaid program. By scheduling patients appropriately and effectively using the auxiliary staff to assist the family in oral health education components of the visits, a productive and cost-effective program can be implemented.

Flexibility is a hallmark of the program; each participating private practice accepts ABCD clients at a caseload level determined by the practice and at the same time, clients have freedom of choice in selecting a dental provider. Education and support encourages private practice dentists to increase their commitment to expanding dental access in the community. The emphasis on non-traumatic techniques and oral health education encourages families to seek and accept regular dental care.

PHYSICIANS. With the ABCD program's growth, an increasing number of Washington pediatricians and family physicians now address oral health during well-child checks because ABCD-trained dentists serve as referral sources. Medicaid reimburses trained and certified primary care providers for delivering oral screenings, health education and fluoride varnish during well-child checks and referral to a dentist as needed. More than 2,200 (one-third) of Washington's practicing primary care physicians have now been trained.

WASHINGTON DENTAL SERVICE FOUNDATION.

Washington Dental Service Foundation is the state's largest foundation committed to improving oral health. The Foundation supports a variety of innovative oral health programs focused on preventing oral disease, expanding access to dental care and increasing awareness of the importance of oral health, including the ABCD Program. The Foundation offers three-year start up grants to Washington counties (at approximately half of the program costs over the first three years of program operation), leadership and administrative support of the statewide ABCD Partnership, and on-going program evaluation. Washington Dental Service Foundation is funded by the Washington Dental Service (WDS), a non-profit dental benefits company serving more than 2 million people throughout the state.

OUTCOMES TO DATE.

- Medicaid utilization rates for Washington children have increased substantially. ABCD has almost quadrupled the number of young Medicaid children in Washington who are receiving dental care -- from 40,000 to 159,000 -- and utilization has increased from 21% to 51.1% in the last 15 years (2012 MAA data)
- The program is also making progress in increasing the number of children who receive care before their 2nd birthday, the best time for early intervention and consistent with the best practice goal of seeing all children for preventive services by their 1st birthday. In 2011, almost 37,000 children under age 2 (29.4 percent of eligible children) received dental services. When the program was initiated in 1997, only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers received dental care. (2011 MAA data)
- ABCD patients are more likely to seek care before oral health problems arise
- Providers who have received ABCD training and participate in the program are more comfortable seeing young children and have a highly favorable view of the program.
- Peer-reviewed national publications have demonstrated that early prevention can substantially reduce future dental care costs¹ and that ABCD is cost-effective method of improving oral health status of Medicaid-insured young children.²

¹ "Early Preventive Dental Visits: Effect on Subsequent Utilization and Costs"; Matthew F Savage, Jessica Y Lee, Jonathan B Kotch, William F Vann. *Pediatrics*, Oct 2004; Vol. 114, No. 4: e418-e423.

² "The effectiveness and estimated costs of the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry program in Washington state"; Kobayashi M, Chi D, Coldwell SE, Domoto P, Milgrom P. *Journal of American Dental Association*, Sept 2005; 136(9):1257-63.

EVIDENCE BASED. Many components of the ABCD program are evidenced based. Examples and related research include:

Early intervention:

- Source: Alm, Wendt, Koch, Birkhed “Oral Hygiene and Parent-Related Factors during Early Childhood in Relation to Approximal Caries at 15 Years of Age” *Caries Res* 2008;42:28–36
- Source: Savage, M., Lee, J., Kotch, J., & Vann, W., *Early Preventive Dental Visits: Effects on Subsequent Utilization and Costs.* *Pediatrics*, 114(4), October 2004.
- Source: Caufield, P., Cutter, G., and Dasanayke, A. *Initial Acquisition of Mutans Streptococci by Infants: Evidence for a Discrete Window of Infectivity.* *Journal of Dental Research.* 1993, 72(1): 37-456.

Fluoride Varnish

- Rozier RG. Effectiveness of methods used by dental professionals for the primary prevention of dental caries. *J Dent Educ* 2001;65(10): 1063-72.
- Marinho VC, Higgins JP, Logan S, Sheiham A. Fluoride varnishes for preventing dental caries in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2002(3):CD002279.
- Marinho VC, Higgins JP, Logan S, Sheiham A. Topical fluoride (toothpastes, mouth rinses, gels or varnishes) for preventing dental caries in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2003(4):CD002782.
- Weintraub JA, Ramos-Gomez F, Jue B, et al. Fluoride varnish efficacy in preventing early childhood caries. *J Dent Res* 2006;85(2): 172-6.
- Autio-Gold, Courts. “Assessing the effect of fluoride varnish on early enamel carious lesions in the primary dentition”. *Journal of the American Dental Association* Vol. 132, pp. 1247-1253
- Quinonez, Stearns, Talekar, Rozier, Downs. “Simulating Cost-effectiveness of Fluoride Varnish During Well-Child Visits for Medicaid-Enrolled Children”. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Vol 160, Feb 2006
- Ramos-Gomez, Shepard. “Cost-effectiveness model for prevention of early childhood caries”. *Jour Calif Dental Assoc.* 1999 Jul;27(7):539-44.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM INFORMATION. Visit the ABCD website www.abcd-dental.org for additional information about Washington’s ABCD Program, including:

1. A link to Washington state Medicaid utilization by year for children under age 1, under age 2 and under age 6
2. A list of published research articles (including a summary of the research and key findings) and a copy of each article
3. State and national recognition of the ABCD Program
4. Recent articles that compare the ABCD Program to Medicaid reform efforts in other states

Contact WDS Foundation for additional information, including:

1. The ABCD Evaluation Plan
2. Power point presentation of evaluation data



"Working with families referred to us by ABCD has been unbelievably gratifying. We have been fortunate to treat wonderful children whose parents or caregivers truly appreciate and value our services."
Eve Rutherford, DDS, Snohomish County, Washington ABCD Dental Champion Emeritus



"I love seeing the small children. It's important they have a dental home at a young age to increase their chances of having good oral health for a lifetime."
ABCD participating dentist in a 2008 survey of Washington ABCD providers