

Memo to the Commissioners

April 3, 2023

From: Liz Blackwell-Moore, Public Health Director

Subject: ARPA Funding for “**Strengthening Oral Health**”: Building a More Robust Children’s Preventative Oral Health Infrastructure in Cumberland County

Background on Preventative Oral Health in Cumberland County: Dental disease is not just about a nice smile. It is linked to a number of systemic health issues including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer’s, preterm/low birth weight babies and many other serious health problems. Dental disease also impacts the entire community because of lost work hours, lost school days, people living in chronic pain, unnecessary ER visits, etc. The solution to dental disease is prevention and early intervention. Yet half of all children in Cumberland County are not getting any preventative oral health care.

There are about 56,000 children between the ages of 1-18 in Cumberland County. More than half of them, about 30,000 children, are currently getting NO preventative dental care at all. Of those 30,000, about 2/3 have MaineCare or no dental benefits. Having dental insurance does not ensure that children have access to regular dental visits or preventative oral exams and cleanings.¹ COVID made that worse. Across Maine in 2019, 63% of children with dental coverage, either commercial or MaineCare, had at least one preventative service, routine exam, or cleaning. In 2021, only 51% of covered children had those services.² While Cumberland County has comparatively more dentists per capita than most Maine counties, many children are not able to access a regular dentist because most dentist offices do not accept MaineCare and children who qualify for MaineCare often face many other barriers to accessing care, including a lack of transportation. For all of these reasons, supporting access to oral health care was identified as a key priority in the Cumberland County Community Health Improvement plan.

Creating a Stronger Infrastructure for Children’s Preventative Oral Health: Providing preventative oral healthcare in schools is a proven strategy for improving children’s oral health. In Cumberland County, there are 3 school districts that partner with Greater Portland Health, 1 school district that partners with the Maine CDC School Oral Health Program, and a few individual schools within several other school districts that partner with an independent practice dental hygienist to provide on-site dental services. MaineCare recently increased the reimbursement rates for oral health care making financial sustainability more possible for the organizations that already take MaineCare, though the new rates have unfortunately not yet attracted additional providers to enroll in MaineCare. A strong, coordinated network of preventative oral health care does not exist in Cumberland County. Our existing patchwork of providers and school-based services leaves many children behind. Strengthening the infrastructure for preventative oral health would provide a foundation for oral health organizations and private dental clinics to expand care and take advantage of the increased reimbursement rates creating a more sustainable system with greater capacity to provide care to all who need it. Providers that currently provide oral health care to people with MaineCare, like Greater Portland Health and Mainely Teeth, could increase the number of patients they see because the reimbursement rates are now a more sustainable payment source, but they do not have the additional equipment and internal processes needed to expand their services.

¹ *Cumberland District Oral Health Profile produced by the Children’s Oral Health Network*

² Data source: Maine Health Data Organization’s All Payer Claims Database (APCD) per the data release requirements defined in 90-590 C.M.R. ch 120, *Release of Data to the Public*. See [MHDO website](#) for more details regarding data restrictions and participating insurers.



Existing Partnerships: The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN) is a small non-profit organization that unites organizations and individuals across the state with the shared vision of ensuring that all children in Maine can grow up free from preventable dental disease. The network catalyzes collaboration and innovation in order to ensure that effective prevention, education, and treatment tools reach all children in Maine. For the past year, COHN has been providing guidance and technical support to the Cumberland County Public Health Department at no charge to support our efforts to create a strategic plan for addressing the gaps in oral healthcare identified in the Cumberland County Community Health Improvement Plan. COHN is the only organization in Maine focused on creating a stronger preventative oral health infrastructure and has the expertise, strategic relationships, and technical skills for supporting the Cumberland County oral health infrastructure project. Please see attached MOU between COHN and the Public Health Department.

Proposed Project: The Cumberland County Public Health Department would work with the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine to complete the following activities to create a more coordinated and sustainable children's preventative oral health infrastructure for Cumberland County.

Phase 1: Mid-2023 to Dec. 2024:

- In-depth mapping and modeling of existing preventative oral health services and potential school-based services
- Outreach to school administrators and nurses to assess readiness and engage support
- Coordination of partners to develop coverage plan for expanding foundational and advanced preventive services, including collaboration with the state School OH Program and Maine CDC to ensure sustainability
- Provide funds to partners for purchase of mobile equipment and staff training needed to start implementing the expansion plan
- Prepare for expansion of foundational and advanced services in stages for school years 2024-25, and 2025-26
- Propose detailed budget for Phase 2 infrastructure funds to address capacity gaps

Phase 2: Mid-2024 to Sept 30, 2026 (overlaps with Phase 1)

- Based on mapping and modeling, and results of the outreach to schools & dental partners:
 - Purchase additional mobile units needed for any remaining schools to be served with foundational and advanced coverage
 - Support buildout of additional restorative capacity as needed to manage referrals for follow-up treatment
- Coordination of partners to implement full expansion of foundational and advanced school-based services, including collaboration with the state School OH Program and Maine CDC to ensure sustainability
- Support development of business agreements with additional restorative partners
- Plan for institutionalizing implementation beyond 2026, ensuring financial sustainability and leadership for ongoing coordination

Project Evaluation:

The purpose of this project is to build the infrastructure needed to expand oral health care to children with MaineCare or who are dental uninsured. Children with an existing dental home will not seek services

through this project. The evaluation of this project will focus on the improvements made to the infrastructure and the amount of children able to access oral health care at the end of the project. Data collection will include:

- A data-driven coverage strategy to ensure that the infrastructure that the project is developing can reach/serve all schools in the county
- Business agreements between the partners and schools about roles and commitments under the coverage strategy (i.e. who will deliver what services where)
- Start-up costs (Mobile equipment, onboarding/training time to staff up the workforce needed, data systems to track follow-up referrals and to evaluate the results) to equip the partners to deliver the services in accordance with their agreements
- A collaboration and coordination process that can be replicated in future years to update the coverage strategy and business agreements in order to institutionalize the coordination of these services for the future/long-term
- Data tracking tools to support ongoing monitoring of results

Budget: *Please see attached budget spreadsheet for the full budget.*

Phase 1 Budget: Below is a narrative explanation of the costs for Phase 1

Project Management & Coordination \$57,600

\$57,600 contract for project management and coordination with Evelyn deFrees (average \$3,200 per month x 18 months) Evelyn's scope of work will include:

- ❖ Facilitating collaborative planning process to create a county-wide infrastructure
- ❖ Work with schools and dental offices to create business agreements and MOUs for providing care to children
- ❖ Create referral mechanisms for the infrastructure
- ❖ Create tracking and evaluation tools and support data collection

Mapping, Modeling & Evaluation \$57,600

\$57,600 contract with Partnerships for Health (average \$3,200 per month x 18 months)

Partner Planning, Coordination and Workforce Expansion \$72,000

Subcontracts/subgrants with each partner for the time to participate in the collaborative planning process, engage in development of the county-wide coverage strategy, on-board and train new staff to deliver the school-based services, develop business agreements & MOUs with schools, and build data capacity to track student referrals and collect evaluation data.

- ❖ Mainely Teeth \$36,000 (average \$2,000 per month for 18 months)
- ❖ Greater Portland Health \$36,000 (average \$2,000 per month for 18 months)

Mobile Equipment \$103,000

X mobile equipment for foundational services (w/out XRay) at about \$5,000 each

X mobile equipment for advanced services (w/ XRay) at about \$20,000 each

(number of each type to be determined through mapping & modeling projections, and as indicated by the coverage strategy)

COHN Direct Administrative Costs \$9,800



COHN will only charge the county for administrative direct costs that are necessary to oversee the subcontracts and subgrants, manage the ARPA funding that passes through COHN, and to meet all federal and county reporting requirements.

TOTAL Phase 1: \$300,000

Phase 2 Budget:

\$250,000 for additional service delivery infrastructure (restorative and mobile)

Specifics TBD based on results of Phase 1

\$75,000 Project Management and Coordination

\$25,000 Evaluation support

TOTAL Phase 2: \$350,000

Total Proposed Project Budget: \$650,000

All funding for the project will flow through The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine. COHN will provide in-kind management and oversight of the project. COHN will not take an "indirect cut" as a percentage of costs, but will bill the County only for the additional administrative direct costs that are necessary to oversee the subcontracts and subgrants, manage the ARPA funding that passes through COHN, and to meet all federal and county reporting requirements. COHN will only charge the administrative costs associated with the accounting and reporting required by ARPA for the project.

Other Funding table - other resources supporting Children's Oral Health in Maine

Funding Source	Managing Partner	Funding Amount	Purpose / Connection to this initiative
ARPA funds from City of Portland	Community Dental	\$490,000	Operating support for 2022-23 to sustain restorative dental care capacity at Community Dental, which is one of the key referral options for kids whose screenings indicate the need for follow-up care
MaineCare (and other private insurers?)	Each dental partner bills for reimbursement for service delivery	Varies by partner and number of kids served	Most of the services to be delivered in the schools (foundational and advanced) are billable services that are covered by MaineCare. (Many of them are also covered by private dental plans, but there may be barriers to accessing payment from private insurers if the school-based providers are not able to be contracted as in-network providers with all insurance plans)
State of Maine School Oral Health Program	Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention	Future potential funding (state general fund budget)	Supports Greater Portland Health's School Oral Health Program in Portland, Westbrook, and South Portland. Potential for increased funding in future years to support institutionalization of the service delivery in CC schools once the coverage strategy has been tested
COHN Operating budget (Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation)	COHN	In-kind staff time	COHN staff have helped the CC PH Manager develop this proposed approach and will continue to support this initiative as detailed in the commitments
Congressional Project Funding ("earmark") - HRSA	COHN	\$650,000 total 2022-23	Virtual Dental Home pilot - has helped to build the capacity of Mainely Teeth to provide mobile services in CC Head Start Programs
ARPA through Maine Department of Labor/State Workforce Board	COHN	\$545,600 total 2022-24	OH Navigator initiative - will establish a new entry-level staff role to help partners statewide to expand their capacity to deliver mobile school-based services
ARPA through Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention	Cross Cultural Community Services	~ \$500,000 total (not sure of exact amount or timeline)	Funds the Oral Health Equity Collaborative, which includes this initiative as one of several priorities. Has been leading the initial planning of this initiative, and will support the OHEC group in serving in an advisory role to help guide this effort and ensure that we are addressing disparities and equity barriers in the design and implementation.