

Oral Health Equity Project

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Objective: To increase access dental care to 1,000 low-income Boston elders residing in subsidized housing, through coordinated screening, referral and case management services.

Methods: The Boston Public Health Commission, in collaboration with the Boston Housing Authority, coordinates the participation of three dental and one dental hygiene school in providing oral health screenings at elder housing developments Demographic and oral data are collected through use of DigiPen technology. Fluoride varnish application and denture labeling are provided where possible. Case management is provided to those referred for additional care. Individuals receive specifically designed educational at each screening.

Results: We screened 860 seniors and 196 disabled low-income adults between 2003 and 2005. The elders were a very diverse group: Whites 32%, African Americans 28%, Asians 21%, Latinos/Hispanics 12% and Other, 7%. Two-thirds (65%) of the participants were female, 1/3 speaks a primary language other than English, 3% had dental insurance, 2/3 of those screened required follow-up referrals and approximately half (53%) of those referred, received appointments. Dental findings showed that 40% were dentate; of those, 55% had untreated caries and 41% received fluoride varnish. While 64% of seniors had dentures, half of the dentures were unstable and 27% needed new dentures.

Conclusion: Boston elders remain a vulnerable and underserved population with special dental needs that are unmet. We have identified increase need for bi-lingual dentists and hygienists as well as the need for medical interpreters. Lack of dental coverage remains a clear barrier to elders in need of dental services.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the necessary components of a successful partnership;
- describe the benefits and limitations of the OHEP service delivery model in eliminating health disparities in oral health; and
- define the role of a local health department in responding to unmet health care needs.

Keywords: Oral Health, Health Disparities