

Vermont Oral Health Plan 2022



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH





Fellow Vermonters,

Good oral health is vital to overall health, yet too many Vermonters suffer with poor oral health. Those who are most at risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, lung disease and cancer are also [most at risk for oral disease](#), which makes other chronic disease more difficult to manage. This increased risk is caused in part by health disparities, which are differences in health and health care that stem from broader inequities among groups.

Oral health disparities have existed in our state and in our country for many years, and the COVID pandemic has made the situation worse. It is more important than ever that our medical and dental health care systems evolve to meet the needs of all Vermonters, regardless of race, wealth, whether they are living with a disability, where and how they live. This updated oral health plan is designed to be used as a roadmap toward health equity.

I would like to thank our partners across the state who have come together to develop this plan. It's the result of consultation and coordination among the many diverse members of the Vermont Oral Health Advisory Panel. These include medical and dental health care providers, professional organizations, public health professionals, payers, advocacy groups, and others. They have built

upon the success achieved since the [2014 State Oral Health Plan](#), added new activities based on [updated guidance regarding the prevention and treatment of dental decay](#) and integrated other state plans and reports, including [the State Health Improvement Plan](#), the [Rural Health Services Task Force Report and Recommendations](#), and the [Dental Access and Reimbursement Working Group Report](#).

The activities outlined in the plan are actionable and achievable. We know how to prevent and treat oral disease, we know who is experiencing the overwhelming burden of disease, and the members of the advisory panel have demonstrated that we have the will needed to create change; the time is now to join forces to combat this winnable battle.

I encourage us all to recognize oral health as a critical component of overall health and to commit to partnership for advancing the work outlined in this plan, which is designed to close the gap between those Vermonters who enjoy good oral health and those who do not.

Sincerely,

Mark Levine, MD

Commissioner, Vermont Department of Health

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Introduction

The 2022 Vermont Oral Health Plan (hereafter referred to as the plan) was developed in collaboration with members of the Vermont Oral Health Advisory Panel and includes input from key informant interviews with stakeholders. It is intended to be a living document that serves as a guide for improving oral health for all Vermonters.

The plan was developed during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which caused uncertainty, instability, and unique challenges. Therefore, the plan is intended to be dynamic and responsive to these contexts. Vermont's oral health champions and stakeholders have shown unwavering passion and dedication during the pandemic, and their involvement in this plan further demonstrates their ongoing commitment.

Many thanks to all the partners who contributed in countless ways to this plan.

Guiding Principles

The plan is the product of a multi-year process and reflects the input, and collaborations from across a diverse oral health-related constituency in Vermont that is informed by state and national data and reports. In developing the plan with stakeholders and partners, guiding principles were woven into the decision-making process. These principles were developed based on the input of stakeholders during initial interviews and workshops.

The following Guiding Principles are Vermont's commitment to create an Oral Health Plan that:

- ✓ **Is equity focused**
- ✓ **Aligns with existing state and federal efforts**
- ✓ **Includes perspectives of health care consumers**
- ✓ **Is evidence-based**
- ✓ **Attends to new or emerging oral health knowledge**
- ✓ **Is focused on highest priority areas**
- ✓ **Is useful and actionable**

Aspirations

The plan aspires to serve all Vermonters so that they have lifelong opportunities for oral health. A broad sector of professional entities will be able to align their work with this plan, improving the oral health status of Vermonters through a variety of strategies.

Completion of the plan should be seen as a starting point rather than an end. It functions as a tool and guide for the people and partnerships for which it serves. Its progress hinges on buy-in, and follow-through by Vermont's medical and dental health care communities.

Who might use the plan?

- Health care practitioners (dental and medical)
- Professional associations
- Advocacy organizations
- State and local public health organizations

How could they use it?

- Understand and support key issues and policies
- Implement evidence-based interventions or strategies in the plan
- Focus advocacy efforts
- Support grant funding requests

Defining Equity

One of the guiding principles for Vermont’s 2022 State Oral Health Plan is that it should be equity focused. To operationalize this principle, plan contributors needed to first develop a shared understanding of what equity means in an oral health context.

According to the Vermont State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) , “health equity exists when all people have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy – especially those who have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, historical injustice, and other avoidable systemic inequalities that are often associated with social categories of race, gender, ethnicity, social position, sexual orientation and disability”.

Contributors to the plan agreed with this definition, emphasizing the importance of providing different kinds of support to different individuals. This shared understanding and focus on health equity informed many of the strategies in the plan, particularly around increasing access to dental health care, providing cultural competency training to dental professionals, and improving oral health surveillance data as a tool to better inform policymakers and legislators.



One Size Does Not Fit All Infographic. Source: www.rwjf.org

“Identify those with the least access and greatest barriers [to oral health] and begin there. Don't just focus on reimbursement, think about who may not have access, i.e., undocumented Vermonters, low-income senior's ineligible for Medicaid, among others”

- Plan contributor

Priority Population: Vermonters with Disabilities

Many adults with disabilities experience dental decay or gum disease caused by or further complicated by their medical condition or developmental disabilities. Six in ten Vermont adults with a disability went to the dentist in 2019. This is less than the three-quarters (75%) of adults without a disability that visited the dentist in the same year. To address this problem, adults with disabilities were identified as one of the priority populations of the Vermont State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

Vermonters with Disabilities were invited to participate in the creation of this state plan to share lived experiences and inform strategies that would help address disparities in oral health. These Vermonters shared the many barriers they have faced in accessing oral health care including; finding transportation to the nearest dental office – particularly in rural areas, a lack of options in local dental care to seek out a dentist with experience treating people with disabilities, dental professionals who do not take time to understand and address their unique needs, and lack of insurance coverage for dental care.

Parents of children with disabilities also face barriers to accessing oral health care both for themselves and for their children including a lack of childcare, conflicting oral health advice from pediatric medical providers, and dental offices that lack the capacity to provide accommodations

for children with disabilities.

Feedback from Vermonters with disabilities has been incorporated into the strategies in this plan where feasible, including providing training for dental health professionals about treating people with disabilities, expanding the dental health workforce to increase availability and options for dental care, and continuing to empower Vermonters with disabilities to advocate for their oral health.

For more resources related to Vermonters with disabilities, see the [Green Mountain Self-Advocates](#) and the [State of Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#).

Priority Population: Vermonters with Disabilities

“I have found it very hard to communicate with providers. We deserve to be respected and treated well. Services should be transparent, there should be clear communication with the patient otherwise providers won’t be able to accommodate patients’ needs.”

- A Vermonter with disabilities



“Physically, it is hard for me to restrain my child. Even if we have addressed all other barriers and made it to the office, the dental appointment won’t be easy because **dental offices don’t seem to have the right tools for individuals with disabilities. If there was a dentist’s office that prioritized individuals with disabilities, then I wouldn’t feel that my children or I were an inconvenience.”**

- A Vermont parent of children with disabilities



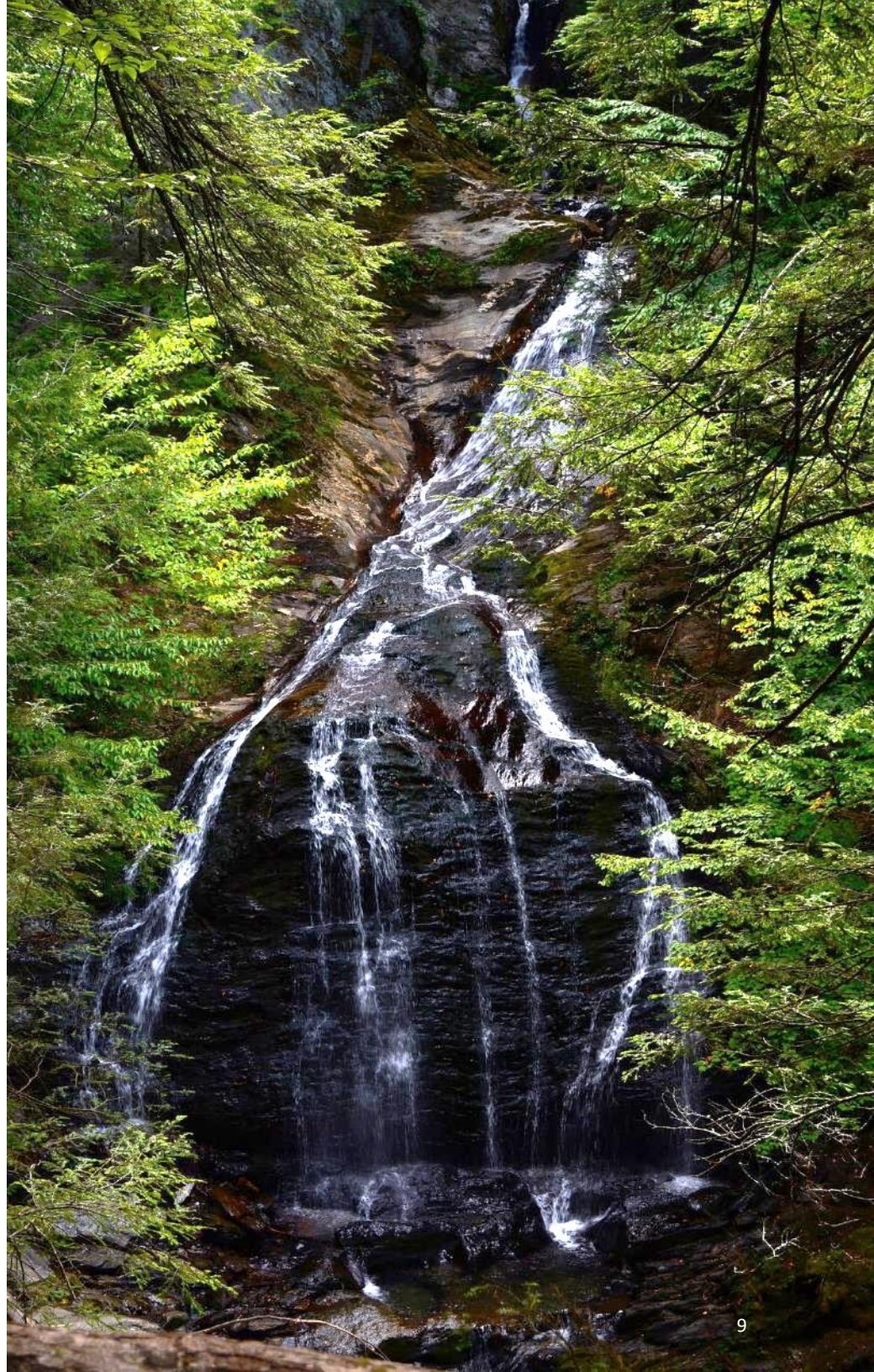
Building on Past and Current Efforts

To further ensure that Vermonters have lifelong opportunities for oral health, this plan builds upon and integrates several recent key state and federal initiatives, assuring its relevance and connections to state and federal efforts.

The key efforts informing this plan are:

- *National efforts including [Healthy People 2030](#) and [Oral Health in America](#).*
- *[2019-2023 Vermont State Health Improvement Plan](#) and other state health plans*
- *[Rural Health Services Task Force Report, 2020](#)*
- *[Dental Access and Reimbursement Working Group Report, 2019](#)*

Drawing from these efforts will further position the plan as feasible in scope and practice and will ensure broad support and alignment with current or future community, state and federal programs and initiatives.



National Efforts

[Healthy People 2030](#) represents a national roadmap for achieving its health outcome goals for the decade across a spectrum of health-related topics. One of the topic areas is oral conditions with the goal to “Improve oral health by increasing access to oral health care, including preventive services.” Accompanying this goal are 15 objectives spanning individual-, community-, and system-level intervention approaches across varied and specified populations that outline data-driven benchmarks for marking the nation’s oral health status. The Vermont Department of Health is currently in the process of developing Healthy Vermonters 2030 goals that will be informed by Healthy People.

In December 2021, the National Institutes of Health published the national report, [Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges](#). This report is a culmination of two years of research and writing by over 400 contributors and explores the national’s oral health over the last 20 years. Topic areas covered include oral health across the lifespan, the effect of oral health on community and the economy, oral health workforce and education, mental illness and substance use, and emerging science and technologies in oral health.

2019-2023 Vermont State Health Improvement Plan

The [2019-2023 Vermont State Health Improvement Plan](#) (SHIP) is a 5-year strategic roadmap for the state of Vermont that identifies priority areas and strategies to address health conditions and outcomes. Core tenets of the 2019-2023 State Health Improvement Plan include a focus on health equity and root causes of health disparities and social conditions impacting health outcomes. Oral health was identified as a priority area with accompanying performance indicators associated with this health outcome. The oral health-related strategies and performance indicators in the SHIP served as a foundation for the development of this plan.

To track the full progress and status of the 2019-2023 Vermont State Health Improvement Plan, see the [performance scorecard](#) through the Vermont Department of Health.

Other State Health Plans

In addition to the SHIP, several other state plans guide work in specific areas of public health, many of which are relevant to oral health.

- [Vermont Cancer Plan](#) (see objective 4.2, page 8): One example of the connection between oral health and cancer is Human Papilloma Virus – HPV – which is thought to cause 70% of oropharyngeal cancers in the U.S. Oral health care professionals can play a unique role in HPV cancer prevention, by promoting HPV vaccination.¹
- [Vermont State Asthma Plan](#): Many drugs used to treat asthma can cause xerostomia – dry mouth – which puts people with asthma at higher risk for gum inflammation. Many of these drugs have low pH, predisposing patients to tooth erosion and cavities.²
- [Vermont Tobacco Control State Plan](#) (see pages 11 and 27): Tobacco use increases the risk of gum disease and other oral health problems. Dental health care professionals are well-positioned to screen patients for tobacco use and refer them to cessation programs.³
- [Vermont State Plan on Aging](#) (see page 13): A healthy mouth is essential for healthy aging; in addition to several studies on the negative impact of poor oral health on brain health, a recent study suggests that the inflammation associated with gum disease may increase the risk of Alzheimer’s dementia.⁴

1) CDC, HPV and Oral Cancer <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/fast-facts/oral-cancer-and-hpv-vaccine/index.html>

2) Oral Health in Asthmatic Patients - a review <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7648282/>

3) American Dental Association, Tobacco Use and Cessation <https://www.ada.org/resources/research/science-and-research-institute/oral-health-topics/tobacco-use-and-cessation>

4) NIH - National Institute on Aging <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/large-study-links-gum-disease-dementia>

Rural Health Workforce Report

Act 26 of 2019 Legislative requirements included an inventory of the current system of rural health delivery in Vermont, considering ways to ensure sustainability of rural health care systems by identifying the major financial, administrative, and workforce barriers and identifying ways to overcome any existing barriers and encourage collaboration among institutional and community service providers. To further act on these requirements, the [Rural Health Services Task Force](#) came into being.

The taskforce found that the least populated and most rural counties in Vermont had the oldest population and the poorest health outcomes, and that Vermont has an increasing percentage of dentists over the age of 60. These findings suggest that access to dental care remains a challenge for both rural and elderly populations and that there is an urgent need to attract dentists to Vermont due to the aging workforce.

Three priority areas were identified by the task force: workforce, care management, and revenue stability. The workforce recommendations in the taskforce report informed many strategies in this plan, including building and retaining the rural workforce and expanding telemedicine services.

Dental Access and Reimbursement Working Group Report

In accordance with Act 72 of 2019, the Department of Vermont Health Access, in consultation with the Board of Dental Examiners and the Vermont State Dental Society, convened a working group of interested stakeholders to evaluate Medicaid program reimbursement rates and explore opportunities for further expanding access to dental care.

Recommendations from the [working group report](#) include implementing fiscally responsible rate increases for select procedures, eliminating co-payment requirements for Medicaid members, exploring the integration of dental services within an Accountable Care Organization model, and continued enhancement and monitoring of student loan repayment and scholarship programs as a strategy to recruit and retain dentists and other dental providers in Vermont.

Updates from the Field

The reports and scorecards referenced in this plan mostly pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledging that present realities may have changed considerably, stakeholders involved in this plan also provided updates from their own work, which are summarized in this section of the plan.

“Most FQHCs have lost staff and are juggling many vacancies, particularly for dental hygienists and assistants.”

- Plan Contributor

“I can no longer provide in person services like fluoride varnish. I hear from parents that the child’s little cavity is now a big one!”

- Vermont Public Health Dental Hygienist

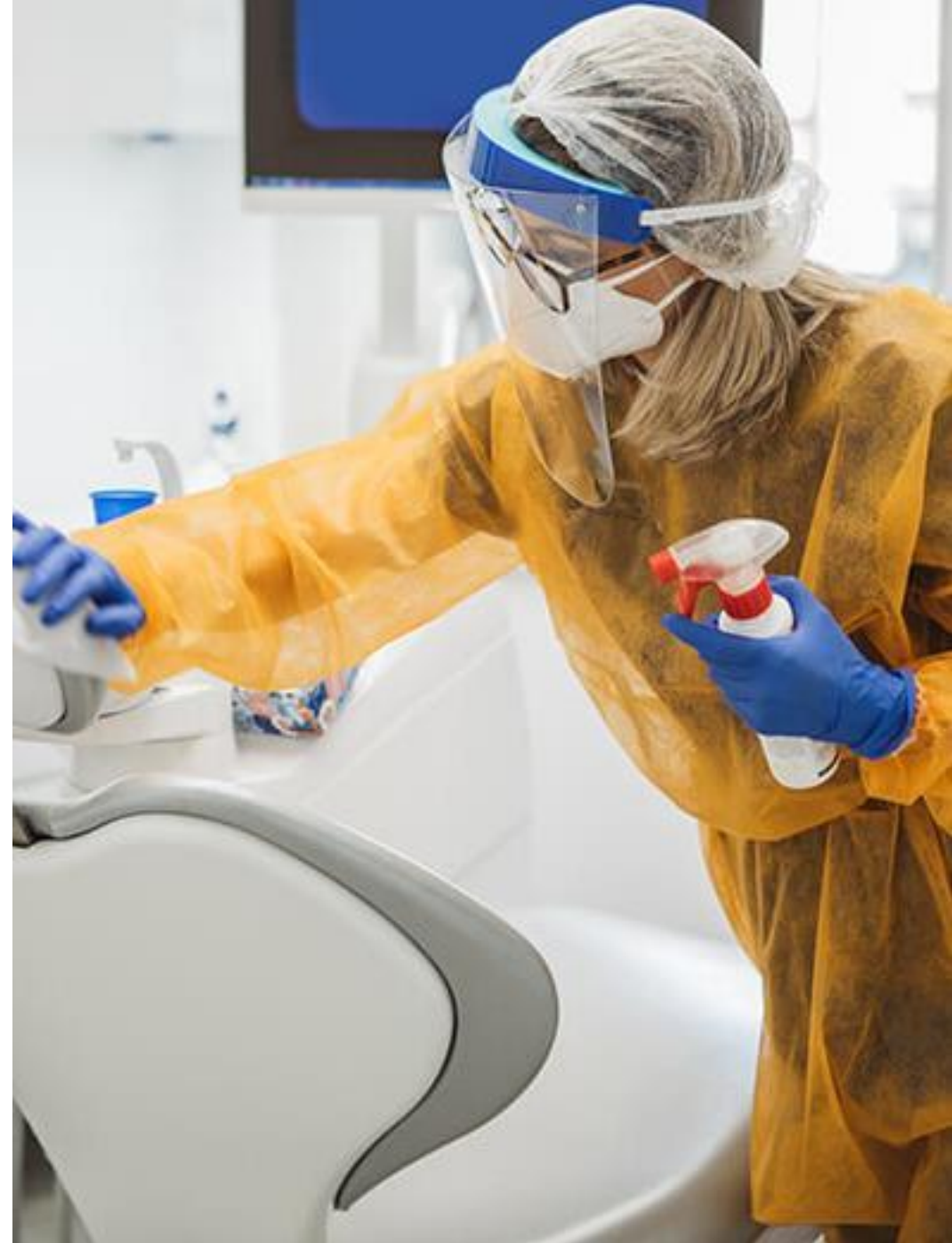
“COVID-19 has exacerbated longstanding and widespread issues related to access to oral health services.”

- Plan Contributor

The Impact of COVID-19 on Vermont's Oral Health

COVID-19 has had a tremendous effect on oral health in Vermont. VDH oral health staff have been deployed for periods of time to the State's COVID-19 response. Clinics are reporting long and growing waitlists and unmet need, with many patients being unable to access dental care throughout the pandemic. Anecdotally, patients seem to be presenting with more complex needs that intersect with other issues. In response to increased demand, workforce shortages, and increased costs of care associated with new safety measures, fewer providers are accepting patients insured by Medicaid. As a result, vulnerable populations have been disproportionately affected and continue to face increased barriers to dental care. The pandemic has also contributed to a shortage of health professionals.

Vermont's school dental health program, 802 Smiles, has also been negatively impacted as guidelines allowing access to school buildings have continually shifted. Currently, there is growing concern that a significant number of eligible children have not been able to receive dental care due to the disruption in school-based programs and other dental health care systems.



Infrastructure Improvements to Increase Oral Health Access in Vermont

Despite the barriers exacerbated by COVID-19, dental practices and healthcare professionals have continued to collaborate to meet patient needs. Various projects are underway to address dental workforce shortages and increase access to dental care:

- A new dental assistant pilot program between the Vermont State Dental Society and the Vermont Adult Career and Technical Education Association (VACTEA) is under development.
- In the fall of 2022, Vermont Technical College will be returning to a two-year dental hygiene program, allowing students to graduate a year sooner.
- Vermont Technical College's Dental Therapy Program will expand the number of allied dental health care professionals in Vermont. The Windham County Dental Center will serve as an internship site.
- The Vermont State Dental Society has developed a dental health workforce brochure that promotes the dental profession. (Available on their website here: <https://www.vsds.org/recruiting-classified>)
- The return of the Congressionally Directed Spending mechanism has allowed the Community Health Centers of Burlington to obtain funding for the future expansion of dental services at their Champlain Island Health Center.
- Teledentistry is a promising practice with growing acceptance in the health community that can make dental care more accessible for many individuals.

2022 Vermont Oral Health Plan Goals and Strategies

The following are the priority goal areas addressed in the plan. These goal areas reflect the critical and urgent needs, gaps, and improvement areas identified by stakeholders through the state planning process. As such, these goal areas are responsive to the times, reflecting and addressing the current oral health landscape in Vermont, and developments and updates since the last state plan.

- 1 Increase Access to Dental Health Care for all Vermonters
- 2 Expand the Dental Workforce
- 3 Expand School-Based Dental Health Programs
- 4 Expand Community Water Fluoridation
- 5 Enhance Oral Health Surveillance
- 6 Promote Quality Improvement Initiatives
- 7 Increase Medical Dental Integration

Definition of Terms

Strategies: Under each goal area are evidence and experience-based strategies that can be implemented by stakeholder groups to work toward that goal.

Recent and Current Activities: During the development of the plan, stakeholders shared ways that they have already been implementing these strategies in their work. Those activities are captured here.

Proposed Activities: Stakeholders also shared actions they either plan to take or would like to see taken in the future to further implement the strategies in the plan.

Increase Access to Dental Care for all Vermonters

Access to dental health care has been an ongoing challenge for many Vermonters that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Barriers include cost, availability, language and culture differences, and fear. The most vulnerable populations include adults with disabilities, individuals from low-income backgrounds, and people of color.

Strategies in this area are intended to address these barriers by supporting increases in cost coverage for individuals receiving Medicare and Medicaid, increasing the capacity of dental care providers, and efforts to provide more culturally and linguistically appropriate care.



Image Source: ddc.vermont.gov

Strategies:

- 1) Increase access to dental care for Vermonters receiving Medicaid and Medicare.
- 2) Increase access to dental care for Vermonters with disabilities.
- 3) Increase access to culturally and linguistically appropriate dental care and services.
- 4) Increase dental practice capacity, efficiency, and productivity.

Strategy 1: Increase access to dental care for Vermonters receiving Medicaid and Medicare.

- a) Increase Medicaid reimbursement levels.
- b) Support efforts to include coverage for dentures in the Vermont Medicaid adult dental benefit.
- c) Ensure that adults covered by Medicaid dental insurance understand their benefits and what is included.
- d) Support efforts to include oral health benefits in Medicare.

Recent and Current Activities

- A professional and predictable process for annually reviewing Vermont Medicaid's reimbursement rates for dental services and evaluating progress towards achieving other recommendations detailed in the Vermont Dental Access and Reimbursement Report has been established.
- Medicaid reimbursement rates for 22 procedures were increased in 2022.

Proposed Activities

- Produce and disseminate updated Dental Care and Dental Insurance data briefs.
- Conduct an older adult Basic Screening Survey.
- Support the realization of the recommendations contained in the [Vermont Dental Access and Reimbursement Report](#).
- Develop and distribute a communications tool to let adults insured by Medicaid know that they have a dental benefit and to promote the importance of preventive dental care.
- Promote patient centered care in dentistry by developing a resource to empower patients on strategies to maximize their dental benefits by preferencing lower cost preventative care.

Strategy 2: Increase access to dental care for Vermonters with disabilities.

Recent and Current Activities

- ☑ Vermont Technical College (VTC) is incorporating training about treating people with disabilities into their dental therapy curriculum.
- ☑ Vermonters with disabilities are a focus population in our State Health Improvement Plan.
- ☑ The University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMCMC) and the Community Health Centers of Burlington (CHCB) are working together to increase access to hospital services for patients with disabilities as well as promoting atraumatic treatment options that can reduce the number of people that need to be seen in the OR.

Proposed Activities

- ☐ Empower Vermonters with disabilities and their families/caregivers to advocate for their oral health. For example, by involving people with disabilities in the development of health policies, trainings, and documents (such as this plan).
- ☐ Promote training about treating people with disabilities to Vermont's dental health care provider community, including a hands-on component whenever possible (experiential learning). Training should focus on evidence based and preventative care to avoid more expensive, complex care in the future.
- ☐ Create opportunities for dental health care providers to shadow peers who have experience treating people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.
- ☐ Promote access to the University of Vermont Medical Center's hospital services through advocacy groups and agencies that serve people with disabilities. Advocate for UVMCMC to continue sharing their OR space for these services as well as promoting atraumatic restorative options that can help keep people out of the OR.

Strategy 3: Increase access to culturally and linguistically appropriate dental care and services.

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Department of Health has received funding to promote the use of community health workers in Vermont.

Proposed Activities

- Use community health workers as a bridge to culturally and linguistically appropriate care and services.
 - Integrate oral health information into the training for community health workers.
 - Consider integrating Community Health Workers in WIC to support families in accessing oral health care.
- Integrate aspects of the community health worker training (e.g., cultural humility, motivational interviewing, case management) into the dental therapy curricula at VTC so that students are better able to meet the oral health needs of Vermonters who are experiencing oral health disparities.
- Promote cultural competence training for dental professionals.
- Include tele-interpreting services (interpretation provided over a phone call) in the Virtual Dental Home model and teledentistry in general.

Strategy 4: Increase dental practice capacity, efficiency, and productivity.

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Department of Health has developed a relationship with the creator of the Virtual Dental Home Model and has applied for grant funding to pilot the model in Vermont. The Virtual Dental Home model is a way to extend private practice dentistry into public health settings (e.g., schools, nursing homes, home visiting programs) using teledentistry.

Proposed Activities

- Pilot the Virtual Dental Home model and replicate the model in other areas in Vermont.
- Increase internet access to support telehealth including teledentistry (Ex: Starlink satellite internet).
- Develop a document that outlines the scope of work of each allied dental professional (dental assistant, dental hygienist, EFDA, dental therapist) so that practices can maximize capacity and efficiency by having all dental health care professionals working at the top of their scope of practice.
- Develop a document/literature review that outlines how allied dental professionals (including EFDAs and Dental Therapists) working at the top of their scope of practice can expand access and increase productivity in a dental practice.

Expand the Dental Workforce

A significant factor that contributes to the disparities in oral health access is the aging healthcare workforce and a shortage of licensed professionals, a problem that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ The percentage of dentists over the age of sixty has increased from approximately 22% in 2005 to 35% in 2017. However, things are trending in the right direction; in 2019 the percentage of dentists over age sixty was 26%.

In terms of race and ethnicity, there is a disproportionately higher representation for white and Asian dental professionals when compared to the U.S. population.² Presence of diverse dental providers not only makes patients from minority ethnic back-grounds feel more comfortable, but research also indicates that non-white providers are more likely to serve uninsured patients and practice in underserved areas.³ Everyone benefits from diversity in the workforce.

The strategies in this area will promote workforce development, with a focus on increasing the racial and ethnic minority workforce and utilizing allied dental health professionals to their full potential.



Strategies:

- 1) **Build stronger connections between partners in the oral health workforce space to address the dental workforce shortage more strategically.**
- 2) **Support workforce development that creates improved access to dental care by increasing the diversity of the workforce.**
- 3) **Utilize Dental Therapists to their full potential.**
- 4) **Utilize Public Health Dental Hygienists and to the full scope of their practice.**

1. [Rural Health Services Task Force- Act 26 of 2019 - Report and Recommendations.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)
2. https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/hpigraphic_0421_1.pdf?rev=aa1f41177af94613a74a307adc11f2f0&hash=8F66B8BF02828DB2E9A6D5D53908F2DD
3. [https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177\(21\)00095-7/fulltext](https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177(21)00095-7/fulltext)

Strategy 1: Build stronger connections between partners in the oral health workforce space to address the dental workforce shortage more strategically.

(Partners include: Vermont Dental Hygienists' Association, Vermont State Dental Society, Vermont Technical College, Center for Technology Essex, Vermont High School Tech Centers, Department of Labor, Area Health Education Centers)

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Dental Hygienists' Association (VDHA) is part of the coalition for modernizing licensure portability, which is supported by the Council of State Governments.
- The Vermont State Dental Society is working with Technology and Career Centers in Vermont to promote dental assisting.
- The Vermont State Dental Society has developed a brochure to promote dental careers in Vermont and they are expanding their recruiting efforts to include allied dental professionals.
- The Vermont State Dental Society coordinates a bi-annual dental workforce meeting.

Proposed Activities

- Promote dental careers to high school students and adult learners by working in partnership with the Agency of Education and other partners (see current activities for examples).
- Expand bi-annual Vermont State Dental Society workforce meetings to include additional partners.
- Explore expansion of the current residency program at UVM.

Strategy 2: Support workforce development that creates improved access to dental care by increasing the diversity of the workforce.

Proposed Activities

- Promote culturally sensitive hiring practices, include information about why diversity is important in Vermont (a mostly white state). Increasing diversity can improve access to and quality of care for all members of the community.
- Catalog workforce diversity efforts happening in the state that can serve as a resource for increasing diversity in Vermont's oral health workforce (e.g., Governor's Workforce Equity and Diversity Council, Vermont Department of Health's Health Equity Team, Vermont Office of Racial Equity).
- Recruit directly from communities that are experiencing oral health disparities.

Strategy 3: Utilize Dental Therapists to their full potential.

Recent and Current Activities

- The Dental Therapy program at Vermont Technical Center (VTC) is set to start in Summer 2023.
- Dental therapists can enroll as Medicaid providers.

Proposed Activities

- Take steps to ensure that the VTC dental therapy program is fully staffed and ready to accept the first class of students in summer 2023, identify barriers and develop solutions.
- Explore placement of Dental Therapists in community settings including schools, community centers, senior centers, free clinics.

Strategy 4: Utilize Public Health Dental Hygienists to the full scope of their practice.

Recent and Current Activities

- Hygienists in Vermont can apply silver diamine fluoride (SDF) in public health settings if they meet certain guidelines.
- Hygienists in Vermont can enroll as Medicaid providers (which allows them to bill directly for their services), if they meet certain guidelines.

Proposed Activities

- Develop a pathway for hygienists to do silver modified atraumatic restorative treatment (SMART) in public health settings. Example: the New Hampshire Technical Institute has a Certified Public Health Dental Hygienist Program.
- Expand utilization of dental hygienists in community settings.

Expand School-Based Dental Health Programs

According to our [2016-2017 Oral Health Survey of Vermont Children](#), one in ten children needed dental care, only 55% of third graders had dental sealants, and children who were eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program were significantly more likely to have tooth decay. Providing quality dental care in schools allows for timely access to oral health prevention, education and dental health care and can help address barriers such as transportation and getting time off from work for dental appointments.⁴

The strategies in this area will expand Vermont's 802 Smiles Network of School Dental Health Programs (formerly the Tooth Tutor Program).



Image Source: www.vtdigger.org

Strategies:

- 1) **Expand the number of schools in Vermont that offer school-based dental health programs under the umbrella of the 802 Smiles Network.**
- 2) **Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the different tiers or levels of school-based dental health programs (i.e., tiers ranging from case management to satellite dental practice in school).**

⁴ <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/dental-carries-cavities-school-based-dental-sealant-delivery-programs>

Strategy 1: Expand the number of schools in Vermont that offer school-based dental health programs under the umbrella of the 802 Smiles Network.

Recent and Current Activities

- ☑ The Vermont Department of Health is creating an 802 Smiles web page that will serve as a “one stop shop” for information about school dental health programs in Vermont.
- ☑ The Vermont Department of Health/Office of Oral Health participates in the Health Department's Maternal and Child Health school-based health peer collaborative.
- ☑ The Vermont Department of Health’s Maternal and Child Health Division prioritizes the provision of oral health for children and adolescents and funds a portion of the state oral health program.

Proposed Activities

- ☐ Clarify the list of schools participating in the 802 Smiles Network annually; include the tier that corresponds to each school.
- ☐ Calculate the percentage of schools in each tier annually to track expansion of school-linked programming to school-based programming.
- ☐ Develop a list of schools which could be targeted for outreach regarding school-based dental health programming (schools that do not participate in an 802 Smiles program that are over 50% Free and Reduced Lunch eligible), then work with Health Department School Liaisons to communicate with those schools.
- ☐ Identify 802 Smiles champions throughout the state.
- ☐ Secure future CDC funding for Vermont to continue to fund 802 Smiles Network coordination and supplies.
- ☐ Support schools and providers in finding and securing additional sources of funding for 802 Smiles programs.

Strategy 2: Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the different tiers or levels of school-based dental health programs (i.e., tiers ranging from case management to satellite dental practice in school).

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Department of Health collects data from schools that are connected with the 802 Smiles Network.

Proposed Activities

- Identify a mechanism for collecting data from schools that will allow Vermont to evaluate the effectiveness of the different tiers of programs in the 802 Smiles Network.

Expand Community Water Fluoridation

Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) is frequently cited as one of the top 10 public health achievements in the 20th century for its contributions to dental health and is a widely accepted evidence-based and cost-effective community intervention strategy to help prevent tooth decay.⁵

In 2019 56% of Vermonters were served by fluoridated community public water systems, well below the 77% target goal set by Healthy People 2030.^{6,7} Nationally, Vermont ranked 41 out of 50 states and District of Columbia with the highest percentage of population served by CWF in 2018.⁸

In the 2019-2023 Vermont State Health Improvement Plan, expanding community water fluoridation is identified as a main sub strategy in the collection of strategies, *Invest in policies and infrastructure that create healthy communities*. The strategies in this plan will expand optimal community water fluoridation in Vermont through ongoing infrastructure improvements and education and awareness efforts.



Image Copyright: James Buck, Source: www.sevendaysvt.com

Strategies:

- 1) **Expand Community Water Fluoridation in Vermont.**
- 2) **Ensure optimal fluoridation levels for systems that fluoridate their water.**

5. <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/index.html#:~:text=Drinking%20fluoridated%20water%20keeps%20teeth,the%20US%20health%20care%20system.>

6. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/health-policy/increase-proportion-people-whose-water-systems-have-recommended-amount-fluoride-oh-11>

7. <https://www.healthvermont.gov/about/performance/state-health-improvement-plan-2019-2023-scorecard>

8. <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/statistics/index.htm>

Strategy 1: Expand Community Water Fluoridation in Vermont.

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) maintains a fluoride webpage that has information about community water fluoridation and natural fluoride.
- VDH is available to provide information to towns when water fluoridation is challenged or initiated.

Proposed Activities

- Develop a communications tool for smaller water systems to help them understand how they might be able to fluoridate using the new tablet system.
- Include information about the benefits of fluoride and fluoridation in well water test results for parents and providers in pediatric and family medicine offices.
- Have information about fluoride and fluoridation available at town meetings and at medical practices, other locations.
- Identify CWF champions throughout Vermont.
- Secure future CDC funding to continue supporting CWF activities in Vermont.

Strategy 2: Ensure optimal fluoridation levels for systems that fluoridate their water.

Recent and Current Activities

- ☑ The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) has submitted newsletter articles to the Vermont Rural Water Association (VRWA), the Green Mountain Water Environment Association and the New England Water Works Association.
- ☑ VDH provides technical assistance and financial support to the fluoridated systems in Vermont.
- ☑ VDH recently increased its commitment to fluoridation by increasing the number of hours funded for the Fluoride Program Coordinator.

Proposed Activities

- ☐ Develop regular cycle of communication with VRWA and GMWEA to promote the CDC's Fluoridation Learning Online course, fluoridation awards, and to celebrate water operators for their role in public health.

Enhance Oral Health Surveillance

According to the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors' [Best Practice Approach for State-Based Oral Health Surveillance Systems](#) (2017), an “overarching primary purpose of public health surveillance is to provide actionable health information to guide public health policy and programs” (pg. 1). Accordingly, data and surveillance may be used for numerous purposes, including: 1. Measuring and monitoring the burden and changes in disease, 2. Guiding immediate action or decisions, 3. Informing planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs, and other uses.⁹

Examples of reports, data collection activities, and dental health information published recently in Vermont include [Vermont’s Guide to Fluoride Levels in Public Water Systems \(2021\)](#), the oral health survey of Vermont children ([Keep Smiling Vermont reports](#)), [Vermont dental health workforce reports](#), in addition to related dental health surveillance and reporting activities available on the [Vermont Department of Health website](#).



Strategies:

- 1) Ensure Vermont’s Oral Health Surveillance Plan is in alignment with State Oral Health Plan strategies.
- 2) Ensure that policy makers and partners are aware of what oral health data is available in Vermont and nationally.

9. For additional uses of data and surveillance see page 2 in the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors’ Best Practice Approach: State-based Oral Health Surveillance System report (2017).

Strategy 1: Ensure Vermont's Oral Health Surveillance Plan is in alignment with State Oral Health Plan strategies.

Recent and Current Activities

- Vermont Department of Health recently hired an oral health program data analyst.

Proposed Activities

- Produce updated Dental Care and Dental Insurance for Vermonters Enrolled in Medicaid data briefs.
- Conduct an older adult Basic Screening Survey to assess needs for Vermonters over 65 and publish results.
- Identify and pilot a mechanism for collecting data from schools that will allow Vermont to evaluate the effectiveness of the different tiers of programs in the 802 Smiles Network.
- Make 802 Smiles data publicly available.
- Secure future CDC funding to continue supporting oral health surveillance activities in Vermont.

Strategy 2: Ensure that policy makers and partners are aware of what oral health data is available in Vermont and nationally.

Proposed Activities

- Develop a presentation of Vermont oral health data and the Association of State and Territorial Dental Director's national oral health data portal and make available to partners.

Promote Quality Improvement Initiatives

Quality improvement refers to making system-level changes to improve quality of care and may include improved patient care and population health, as well as lower healthcare costs. Quality improvement projects can include payment reform strategies that prioritize prevention and monitoring oral health indicators (i.e., rates of dental sealants), in addition to other alternative reimbursement models (i.e., [value-based care model](#)).



Strategy:

- 1) **Integrate changes in oral health practices and the oral health care system that will promote the triple aim in health care: Improved patient care, lower cost of providing care, and improved population level dental health indicators.**

Strategy 1: Integrate changes in oral health practices and the oral health care system that will promote the triple aim in health care: Improved patient care, lower cost of providing care, and improved population level dental health indicators.

Recent and Current Activities

- The Vermont Department of Health offers regular trainings to dental professionals on various topics that can help improve oral health equity and quality services for all Vermonters.

Proposed Activities

- Develop a menu of quality improvement projects and potential funding sources that practices and organizations can choose from.
- Organize training opportunities for dental professionals specifically in evidence-based topics such as minimally invasive dental care and medical management of caries.
- Align payment mechanisms with current best practice (i.e., incentivize what works to prevent and treat disease vs. complex treatment).

Increase Medical Dental Integration

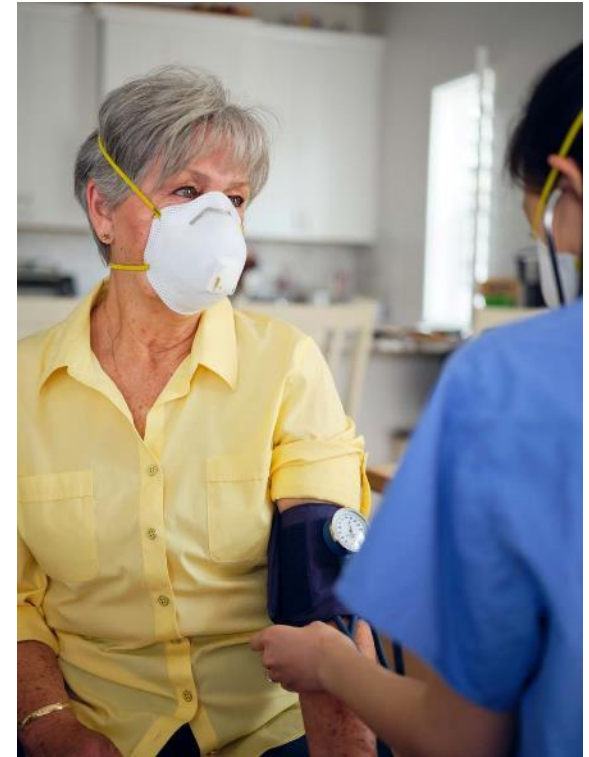
Poor oral health is linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity.¹⁰ However, dental and medical health care systems often do not treat oral health as a part of overall health. Reasons for this include separate medical and dental insurance providers, electronic health records, training institutions, and practice locations.

Medical-dental integration has shown to improve health outcomes and reduce the cost of care. Despite the longstanding separation between medicine and dentistry, opportunities exist to promote coordinated, collaborative interprofessional practice to children and adults. One Vermont example is the Child Health Advances Measured in Practice network (CHAMP), a network of pediatric and family medicine practices that participate in quality improvement initiatives, including oral health. Additionally, the University of Vermont's Dental Residency Program is part of the Family Medicine Department, which increases collaboration between the primary care professionals.

The strategies in this area seek to build on this work by integrating medical and dental priorities both at the state systems level and at the provider level.

Strategies:

- 1) **Integrate oral health care messages and services into medical homes and medical health care messages and services into dental homes.**
- 2) **Integrate oral health information and activities into other state plans and initiatives.**



¹⁰ https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2021/21_0027.htm

Strategy 1: Integrate oral health care messages and services into medical homes and medical health care messages and services into dental homes.

Recent and Current Activities

- ☑ The Office of Oral Health had a HRSA grant to integrate a public health dental hygienist into two FQHCs to integrate oral health into primary medical care and create a bidirectional referral system.
- ☑ Vermont participates in the From the First Tooth program, which is a program that helps medical health care providers integrate oral health messages and services as part of well childcare.
- ☑ Two district Health Department offices (Newport and Burlington) employ dental hygienists to provide oral health services for families enrolled in the WIC program and to promote oral health as part of primary care in prenatal and pediatric practices.
- ☑ The Vermont Technical College's dental hygiene program coordinates with UVMHC Children's Hospital to provide oral health care assessments and preventive services to children who are hospitalized.

Proposed Activities

- ☐ Expand the work started by the HRSA grant to integrate public health dental hygienists into other medical homes to promote the inclusion of oral health messages and services as part of primary medical care and to promote bidirectional referrals between medical and local dental practices.
- ☐ Explore reimbursement models that would incentivize preventative oral health care in medical settings.
- ☐ Include oral health information in [My Healthy Vermont](#) and consider ways to track the number of dental health care providers who refer patients to MHV programs. My Healthy Vermont is a website dedicated to helping Vermonters get the support they need to take control of their health.
- ☐ Explore opportunities to promote interprofessional education.
- ☐ Promote the use of the [Vermont HPV Toolkit for Dental Health Care Providers](#). This toolkit is designed to help dental health care providers promote the HPV vaccine to patients.
- ☐ Promote [802 Quits Continuing Education Courses for Dental Health Care Providers](#). These courses help dental health care professionals understand how to help their patients quit tobacco.

Strategy 2: Integrate oral health information and activities into other state plans and initiatives.

Recent and Current Activities

- ☑ Documents connecting oral health to Vermont's 3-4-50 initiative have been developed.
- ☑ The Vermonters Taking Action Against Cancer Plan includes information about involving dental health care providers in promoting the HPV vaccine and has adopted a toolkit for dental health care providers to support them in this work.
- ☑ 802 Quits has adopted two continuing education courses to support dental health care providers in helping their patients quit tobacco. These free courses are available online and have been approved by Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation for dental CE credit.

Proposed Activities

- ☐ Develop an inventory of the state plans and initiatives that incorporate oral health; monitor progress on the oral health activities that are included in the plans or initiatives.