

# Massachusetts Oral Health Equity Project – January 2018

The goal of the **Oral Health Equity Project (OHEP)** is to increase access to oral health care services for Black and Hispanic youth aged 0-14 in Massachusetts.

The communities of **Worcester and Holyoke** were chosen as focus areas for this project:

- The percent of Black and Hispanic residents is higher than the state as a whole
- Worcester is the largest city in the state without community water fluoridation

MassHealth (Medicaid) enrolled children 0-14 data shows that 4,078 children in Holyoke and 5,274 children in Worcester did *not* have a dental claim in the previous 12 months, confirming that for lower-income children these two cities are geographical hotspots within Massachusetts for inadequate dental care.

## Community Engagement

The first year of the OHEP was dedicated to community engagement in Worcester and Holyoke in order to inform project interventions. The following strategies were used to engage community members and assess barriers to oral health care:

- Attended **9 community meetings** and a total of **564 families** received educational materials
- Collected **123 oral health surveys**
- Conducted **8 key informant interviews** (7 dentist and 1 member of a coalition aimed at increasing access to oral health services for children)

Data collected from the oral health surveys and community events pointed to **several barriers** in access to oral health care including:

- Language barriers
- Cost of dental care/insurance
- Time limitations
- Transportation
- Difficulty getting a dental appointment

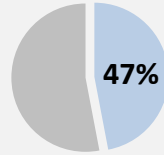
**Potential solutions** to barriers related to accessing dental care were identified through the key informant interviews and included: diversifying the oral health workforce, increasing the role for medical providers, leveraging school-based resources, and providing care navigation services for families.

## Building Partnerships

The community engagement activities informed several partnerships which were engaged between Year 1 and Year 2 of the project including:

- School-based partners
- Community Health Centers
- Early Childhood Programs
  - WIC
  - Early Intervention
  - Head Start
- MassHealth Dentaquest

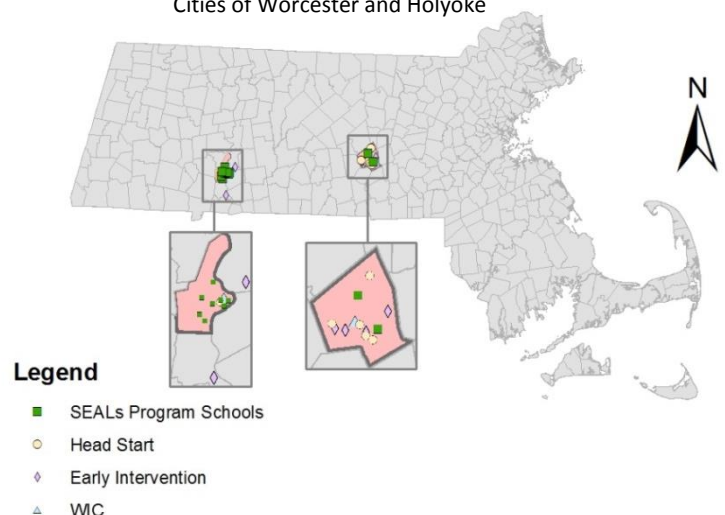
### Access to Oral Health Care



Access to dental care is a problem for many children in Massachusetts, particularly children on Medicaid.

***In 2014, only 47% of children in MA who were eligible for Medicaid received any oral health service.***

Oral Health Equity Project Partners  
Cities of Worcester and Holyoke



## Interventions

Several strong partnerships were built for this project in the communities of Worcester and Holyoke. The OHEP team collaborated with each of the partners to develop targeted interventions. Currently, the OHEP team is in the process of collecting data from each partner and beginning intervention activities. Intervention activities are detailed below:

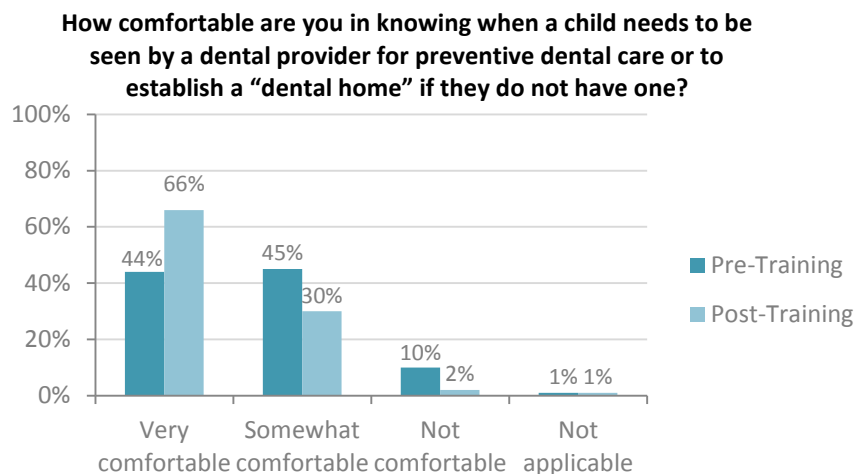
### Public Schools

- A nurse care coordinator was hired for Worcester Public Schools and Holyoke Public Schools
- The nurse care coordinators are working collaboratively with school nurses across their community to identify children in need of dental care, track referrals to community health centers, and track receipt of dental services for those children in need
- The nurse care coordinators are also providing education to children and parents on the importance of oral health

### Early Intervention

- To date, 104 Early Intervention providers at 6 program sites between March and July 2017 in Worcester and Holyoke have been trained by the OHEP team on the importance of oral health in early childhood, oral health assessment, prevention, and how to help families establish an oral health home
- Early Intervention providers in Worcester and Holyoke began implementing a screening/ referral form developed by the OHEP team to track dental referrals over time

*A pre-post survey was conducted at the Early Intervention trainings. Below are results from one of the survey questions:*



- In the 2016-2017 year, a total of 1,413 children were seen by Early Intervention staff in the Worcester and Holyoke sites that were trained for the Oral Health Equity Project including.
- 335 forms have been collected to date from initial intake appointments in Worcester. 65% of those with teeth did not have a dental visit in the past 6 months.
- 94 forms have collected from initial intake appointments in Holyoke. 62% of those with teeth did not have a dental visit in the past 6 months.
- 81% of children in Worcester and Holyoke who had teeth but did not have a dental appointment in the past 6 months were encouraged by EI staff to make an appointment.
- **Initial EI trends:** Since the start of the project, there has been an increase in EI staff categorizing the children that they see as being in need of dental services and, therefore, an increase in the number of families encouraged to make appointments with dental providers.

## Community Health Centers

- Family Health Center of Worcester and Holyoke Health Center have hired a Community Health Worker dedicated to increasing the number of dental visits
- The community health workers are tracking referrals from various sources, such as public schools, Early Intervention, and WIC. This tracking and follow-up system will help find solutions to patients' barriers to care.
- To date, the following data has been collected:
  - At Family Health Center in Worcester, 113 referrals were received by the CHW, 80 (71%) of those had appointments booked in dental by the CHW, 36 (45%) of those kept their appointments to date. 19 (24%) of patients were no-shows.
  - At Holyoke Health Center, 89 referrals were received by the CHW, 51 (57%) of those had appointments booked in dental by the CHW, 43 (84%) of those kept their appointments to date. 8 (16%) of patients were no-shows.

## Next Steps

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In the next years 3 years of the OHEP, the team will work with each of the partners on:

- Continuing data collection, analysis, and evaluation to inform continuous development of project interventions
- Expansion of intervention activities to include more sites and partners
- Developing plans for ensuring project sustainability
- Disseminating project findings