



Partnership for
Children's
Oral Health

A network to ensure that all children in Maine
can grow up free from preventable dental disease

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

A Message from our Executive Director

Dear Children's Oral Health Partners,

While 2020 brought many challenges, it also brought many opportunities for innovation and collaboration. The Partnership for Children's Oral Health (Partnership) was developed as a network of diverse partners committed to a **shared vision: making Maine a place where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.** This vision cannot be realized by one organization; it requires the support, collaboration, and dynamic work of many players.

Our network structure enables partner organizations to collaborate on strategies and initiatives, leveraging significant shared capacity, expertise, and energy. Providing backbone organization support to the network, PCOH staff serve as convenors and coordinators for initiatives carried out by partners across the state. While the pandemic forced us to rethink how we do our work, it also reinforced the need for systemic change.

Each year, the PCOH network grows and gains strength. We are influencing state and federal oral health policy, implementing innovative initiatives to ensure more children have oral health care, and elevating the overall importance of oral health in the state. None of this would be possible without you, our supporters and partners.

Thank you for your commitment to children's oral health. We hope you find our collective progress in 2020 inspiring and motivating as we move forward together towards making Maine a place where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

With gratitude,
Becca Matusovich

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Facing 2020's Unique Challenges.....	2
Partnership Programs and Initiatives:	
Action Teams.....	5
Featured Initiative:	
The Virtual Dental Home Pilot.....	6
Increasing the Network's Capacity to Work on Oral Health	8
The View Ahead	9
Financial Report.....	10
Partner Organizations.....	11

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Facing 2020's Unique COVID-19 Challenges:

THE STRENGTH OF THE NETWORK APPROACH

It would be impossible to write this report without acknowledging the effect of COVID-19 on the oral health world in Maine. The pandemic shaped much of the work that the Partnership prioritized for 2020 and, further, has informed our longer-term efforts. For the last several years, we had been developing collaborative relationships to work on shared oral health goals. As a result, we were well-positioned to adjust plans and act quickly to ensure children's oral health needs were not overlooked as COVID-19 disrupted every aspect of life for Maine's children and the already fragile systems that serve them.

In the early months of 2020, we were gearing up for the legislative session, planning a coworking space for people in public health, continuing to develop our action teams, and preparing for our second annual network-wide convening. Like everyone else, we had to pivot rapidly to figure out how to do our work remotely, a particular challenge since most of our initiatives revolve around convening partners to address oral health issues of shared importance.



2020 meant making the shift from in-person meetings to Zoom.

COVID-19 Program Successes

On March 31st, the Partnership convened its annual network-wide meeting, forced by the pandemic to shift the proceeding to Zoom. Our revised agenda focused on how we could leverage the network to address the needs created by the pandemic. Our partners identified four areas of focus for our COVID-19 response effort:

1. Ensuring that children had access to oral health supplies since they could not access other preventive services in their now closed schools,
2. Promoting teledentistry to enable access to care and reduce COVID-19 exposure risk,
3. Creating a coordinated strategy for people who lack an existing dental home to access emergency dental care, and
4. Helping Maine's non-profit dental providers sustain their services.

The results of these collaborative pandemic response efforts clearly demonstrate the power of the network approach.

NON-PROFIT DENTAL CENTERS We hosted weekly (and now bi-weekly) Zoom meetings for Maine's non-profit dental centers. This forum for peer support has helped the centers manage the clinical and organizational complexities of meeting Maine's oral health needs while also navigating the financial difficulties of their own centers caused by the pandemic. We also partnered with other members of the Maine Oral Health Funders to pool funding and distribute over \$160,000 in rapid relief grants to the non-profit dental centers.

"Being able to connect with other non-profit dental centers was incredibly helpful as we navigated the challenges of this pandemic. Staying open for emergency care and ensuring our patients could get the care they needed were our priorities. In addition we learned from each other as we planned the re-opening of our practices."

—Dr. Norma Desjardins, Executive Director, St. Apollonia Dental Clinic

DENTAL ACCESS MAP We created a Google Map on the PCOH website to show where people without a dental home can go to get dental care during the pandemic. We are now adding information about accessing routine care to extend the map's usefulness post-pandemic.

"We frequently get calls on our Helpline from people needing help getting oral health care. These people are often in severe pain or have other debilitating side effects, such as the inability to eat. The map was very helpful as we tried to connect people to care during the confusing early days of the pandemic."

—Mary Schneckeburger, Consumers for Affordable Health Care

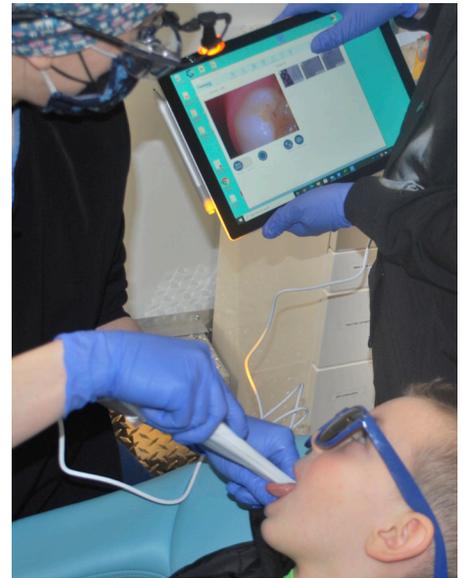


Dental access map, available at mainepcoh.org/covid19/map

TELEDENTISTRY We worked with oral health advocates to seek clarified guidance from the Maine Board of Dental Practice and MaineCare regarding use of teledentistry which was not yet defined in state law. Without a definition and rules in place, providers faced challenges in utilizing teledentistry to reduce COVID-19 exposure for staff and patients. The Board of Dental Practice issued clarification in April regarding remote care that was allowable during the public health emergency, and shortly after MaineCare provided billing guidance to enable reimbursement for remote exams. Both of these measures were very helpful for providers working to triage urgent cases especially while many dental offices were closed or mostly-closed due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

“Ensuring dentists can provide care via teledentistry is an important area of advocacy for us. The MDA is pleased to work with partners to raise awareness of the importance of teledentistry as one mechanism to provide care during the pandemic and beyond.”

—Angela Westhoff, Executive Director of the Maine Dental Association



Teledentistry is an important tool for ensuring access to care, during the pandemic and beyond

ORAL HEALTH KITS We partnered with 12 organizations to organize the rapid distribution of more than 50,000 oral health kits to kids at more than 100 schools with help from over a hundred local volunteers.

“These kits helped meet thousands of children’s basic oral health needs in this challenging time. Something as small as a toothbrush can change the life and outcomes for a child.”

—Amber Lombardi, IPDH, The Opportunity Alliance and Mainely Teeth



While these COVID-19 response strategies were designed to address the acute challenges triggered by the pandemic, they all expose the chronic systemic gaps of Maine’s fragmented and under-resourced oral health infrastructure. By the end of 2020, some of the immediate pandemic response work began to wind down as we incorporated this work into our ongoing initiatives and structures. The lessons learned during our immediate COVID-19 response efforts—including new information about the systemic gaps in the oral health infrastructure—will be integrated into our plans moving forward.



We had lots of help from partners assembling oral health kits for schools.

Partnership Programs and Initiatives: Action Teams

Action Teams are organized around specific children’s oral health issues and challenges, building support for system change in key areas. These groups bring together partners to set priorities and develop solutions to these issues of shared importance. PCOH staff and contracted consultants support Action Team members as they develop projects to address identified priorities, produce needed data reports, recruit funding to support these efforts, share lessons learned, and advocate for policy changes.

The network has identified three strategic priorities:

1. Integrate oral health into primary care,
2. Expand prevention in school and community settings, and
3. Transforming our oral health system to serve all people in Maine.

In 2020, we completed the launch of Action Teams on all three shared priorities; each priority has increased in urgency and importance due to the pandemic.

Take care of your oral health at HOME

H Have healthy snacks and give your mouth a break in-between.
Frequency of snacking matters and some foods are better for your teeth than others. You need time in between eating for your saliva to bring your mouth back to a healthy space!
www.fromthefirsttooth.org/category/parents-caregivers/

O Open your mouth daily for brushing and flossing.
Brush for 2 minutes 2 times per day, using toothpaste with fluoride (just a pea-sized amount!). And remember to floss every day to keep cavities from forming in the hiding places between your teeth!

M Make time for fun!
What 2-minute songs can you find to brush your teeth to? If you can find a longer song you can use the extra time to floss, and do a little dancing too!

E Educate yourself!
Learn what causes tooth decay and how to stop it before it becomes a major problem.
www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/childrens-oral-health/tooth-decay-process

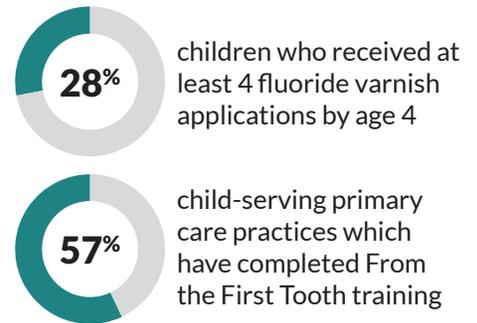
Take care of your oral health at HOME - a resource for students to help manage oral health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Integrating Oral Health into Primary Care

The **Health Integration Action Team**—formed in 2019—is actively working on several initiatives to accelerate the integration of oral health into primary care. Priority projects include the following:

- Expanding From the First Tooth so that more primary care providers build oral health assessments, education and fluoride varnish into well-child visits for young children.
- Testing the Virtual Dental Home model to help children in Head Start settings get connected to a dental home while receiving all of their preventive care in their pre-school setting.

DATA POINTS



Source: From the First Tooth 2019 Annual Report

FROM THE FIRST TOOTH improving the oral health of Maine's children

WHO
Infants and children of Maine with teeth seen at a medical home

WHAT
From the First Tooth is a statewide pediatric oral health initiative that focuses on improving the oral health of Maine's children by increasing access to preventive dental services within their medical home

WHERE
Primary care medical practices that see Maine children

Featured Initiative: The Virtual Dental Home Pilot

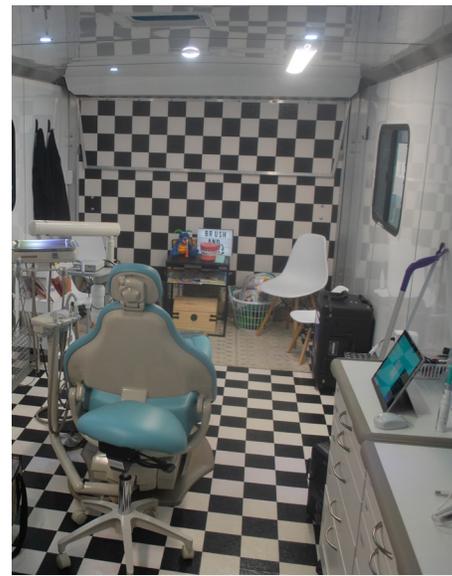
The Virtual Dental Home (VDH) is a community-based model of care in which children become established patients with a dental practice but are able to receive all of their preventive care and early intervention in school or primary care settings without having to travel to the dental office for appointments unless they need more complex treatment.¹

In 2020, we partnered with the Waterville Community Dental Center and Jessie Albert Dental & Orthodontic Center to develop a Maine-tailored version of the VDH model and begin testing it with several Head Start locations. Head Start and Dental Center staff worked together to create common tools and protocols using two approaches to adapt to different space and COVID-19 restrictions: one in the Head Start program facility and the second in a mobile dental trailer.

This field-test will wrap up early in 2021, at which point the VDH work group will review results and make refinements to the protocols. A full pilot serving all of the Head Start program locations in Kennebec, Somerset, and Sagadahoc counties will launch this spring. We plan to add other partners and regions to an expanded pilot in the fall of 2021. Grants from the Davis Family Foundation, Maine Health Access Foundation, and Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation are helping to fund this project.

“As a pediatric dentist, I spent my career trying to make sure I could care for all the kids that need care, but the need is greater than we could handle in our office and we know that many parents had trouble getting time off from work to bring children in for appointments. The Virtual Dental Home is a real way for dentists to reach patients who cannot reach us. This model presents an exciting opportunity to make sure all kids can get the care they need to stay healthy.”

—Dr. Stephen Mills



The Mainely Teeth mobile trailer ready for deployment in the VDH pilot; Dr. Kailee Williams reviewing oral screenings

¹ About the Virtual Dental Home. Retrieved from <https://dental.pacific.edu/departments-and-groups/pacific-center-for-special-care/projects/virtual-dental-home-system-of-care/about-the-virtual-dental-home>

Expanding Prevention in School and Community Settings

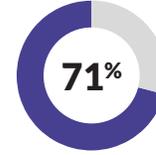
In 2020, the **School Action Team** launched and is now in the process of choosing priority activities to improve and increase access to oral health in school and community settings. Emerging goals for work on this strategic priority include the following:

- Building a system of care informed by data and clinical evidence.
- Ensuring adequate funding for school services.
- Establishing a statewide, centralized system and common tools to support providing dental services in schools.
- Increasing the capacity of school-based oral health providers.
- Engaging communities and tailoring school-based oral health programs to meet the needs of specific groups, including but not limited to immigrant families, children with special needs or who are growing up in foster care, and children from underserved racial or ethnic communities.

DATA POINTS



Maine elementary schools participating in the state's School Oral Health Program



Maine K-12 schools offering some form of oral health services to at least some students

Note: Data from 2018-2019 school year. Some schools have paused oral health services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: PCOH Study of Oral Health Services in Schools

Transforming our Oral Health System to Serve All People in Maine

The third strategic priority focuses on the fundamental issue of sustainable access to oral health care for all Mainers, including those who have dental coverage under MaineCare (Maine's Medicaid). One major reason many children experience barriers to timely dental care is the insufficient number of dental providers enrolled with MaineCare. This is in part because reimbursement has proven financially unsustainable, even for non-profit dental centers. Some dental providers do still provide care by drawing on grants or volunteer time but the services remain fragmented and inconsistent for too many children.

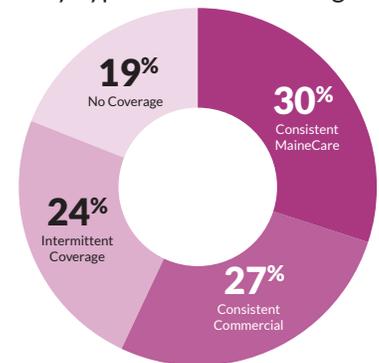
To address this challenge, we are collaborating with other members of the Maine Oral Health Funders to develop a shared systems-change initiative to ensure Maine is able to provide quality, sustainable, and accessible oral health care for all.

The emerging goals of this initiative include strategies to promote the following:

- Immediate survival of Maine's core non-profit dental providers.
- Long-term sustainability of Maine's core non-profit dental providers.
- Increased capacity of the MaineCare dental provider network to serve people with MaineCare.
- Increased access to quality oral health care and improved oral health outcomes, including receiving more preventive care and reducing the amount of oral health disease and treatment needed.

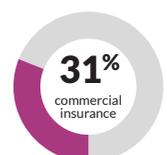
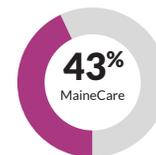
DATA POINTS

Maine Children Under Age 21 by Type of Dental Coverage



Source: 2019 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database & Kids Count Data Center

% of fully-insured children who had **NO** preventive dental care in 2019



Source: Maine Health Data Organization All Payer Claims Data

Increasing the Network's Capacity to Work on Oral Health

In addition to the Action Teams, we also support several work groups focused on improving our collective capacity for particular functions. This work cuts across and serves all of the Partnership's focus areas, providing support for common needs of the Action Teams and increasing the network's capacity to achieve our shared vision.

- **Communications Strategy Work Group:** helps develop long-term communications plans, provides guidance on communications strategies including social media posts, print media opportunities, and reports or other documents.
- **The Data and Policy Work Group:** once fully formed, this group will focus on data and policy needs to improve children's oral health outcomes.
- **Oral Health Policy Advocates:** convenes before each legislative session to build relationships and share opportunities to collaborate on upcoming oral health bills.

In 2020, we continued to invest in the tools that partners need to be effective in our work together on the strategic priorities. We partnered with University of Southern Maine's Cutler Institute to analyze the 2016-2019 data in the Maine Health Data Organization's All Payer Claims Dataset. Through a collaboration with the Maine Children's Alliance, the Maine KidsCount oral health indicators now feature this annually updated claims data.

We commissioned a comprehensive study of school oral health services in Maine schools. Despite COVID-19 disruptions, it provides an excellent baseline of the state of school oral health services before the pandemic. We also expanded the PCOH website, launched our newsletter, and created social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Our first posts highlighted our selection as a featured partner for Crest's national 12 Days of Smiles campaign in December.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Almost half of Maine children and youth under age 21 had either no dental coverage or had coverage for only part of the year.
2. About 3 out of 10 children with commercial dental benefits, and 4 out of 10 children with MaineCare, had no claims for preventive dental care in 2017.
3. Preventive dental care among Mainers with dental benefits peaks in elementary school aged children and declines through adolescence.
4. The differences between preventive dental care rates for publicly-insured and privately-insured



A sampling of recent communications, policy, and data tools, top to bottom:

- [2019 PCOH Dental Care data brief](#)
- [Maine PCOH Study of School-Based Oral Health Services in Maine](#)
- [An Act to Improve Oral Health and Access to Dental Care for Maine Children from the 2019-2020 Maine Legislative Session](#)

PCOH staff, Kalie Hess and Becca Matusovich, at the U.S. Capitol, taken before COVID-19

The View Ahead

2021 marks the beginning of our second year addressing the challenges COVID-19 has brought to Maine's oral health system. We will continue to convene partners remotely for our collaborative work towards our shared vision. We are deeply aware that COVID-19 has only exacerbated poor oral health outcomes for children in Maine and highlighted the deficits in the state's oral health system. Our work in 2021 will focus on shoring up the current system of care while preparing for the future, including the following:

- ➔ Expanding the Virtual Dental Home Pilot to more Head Start sites and beginning to explore its potential in school and primary care settings.
- ➔ Convening Action Teams and supporting collaborative projects.
- ➔ Bolstering the oral health data available in Maine by bringing together partners to identify how to better use this data and enhance the data Maine collects to monitor children's oral health.
- ➔ Developing communication capacity and resources to help our partners convey effectively and broadly the importance of oral health and the need to work together on these issues.
- ➔ Passing legislation to fully fund Maine's School Oral Health Program and to restore an oral health coordinator at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention to provide state leadership for oral health within Maine's public health system.
- ➔ Continuing to be nimble and respond to opportunities and guidance from the partners in order to move closer to our vision and maximize our positive impact on children's oral health in 2021.

2020 Financial Report

The Partnership is fortunate to have core funding to support our small staff and the costs of operating the 501(c)3 organization and coordinating the network. We recruit additional project funding to pass through to partner organizations to support their capacity to work on our shared mission and help partners develop their own grant proposals for joint projects.

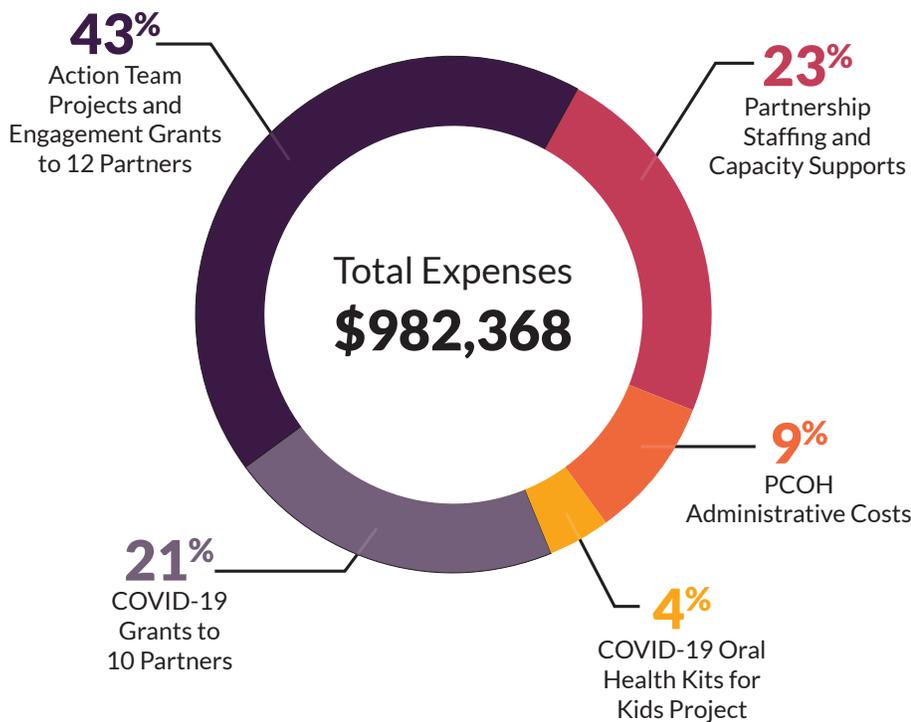
“We are gratified to see how many organizations and stakeholders have pulled together to strengthen the Partnership’s work during its first few years. Our foundation is thrilled to pledge another five years of operating support to build on this strong beginning so that Maine can become a place where no child suffers from preventable dental disease.”

**—Andy Klingenstein, Chairman and CEO
of the Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation**

THANKS TO OUR 2020 FUNDERS

- Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation*
- Northeast Delta Dental*
- Betterment Fund*
- Maine Health Access Foundation*
- Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
- Maine Community Foundation
- Bangor Savings Bank Foundation
- Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation
- Hygienists for Humanity
- United Way of Eastern Maine
- United Way of Kennebec Valley
- United Way of Mid Maine
- United Way of York County

*Core operational funders



Partner Organizations

The Partnership is only as strong as those who help make this work possible. Our sincere gratitude to our growing list of partners working together to make sure all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.



Partnership for Children's Oral Health

Advancing Oral Health in the Safety Net
Aroostook Community Action Program*
Bangor Savings Bank Foundation
Betterment Fund
Bingham Program
Bureau of Veterans Affairs
Catholic Charities of Maine,
 Jessie Albert Dental and Orthodontic Center*
Community Catalyst
Community Concepts
Community Dental*
Consumers for Affordable Health Care
Greater Portland Health*
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In Her Presence*
Island Dental
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Klingenstein Philanthropies
Lincoln County Dental
Maine Access Immigrant Network
Maine Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics*
Maine Children's Alliance
Maine Community Foundation
Maine Council on Aging
Maine Dental Association
Maine Dental Health Outreach, Inc*
Maine Developmental Disabilities Council
Maine Equal Justice
Maine Health Access Foundation
Maine Medical Association*
Maine Mobile Health Program
Maine Oral Health Coalition*
Maine Oral Health Funders
Maine Parent Federation*
Maine Primary Care Association
Maine Public Health Association
Maine Resilience Building Network
Maine School Oral Health Program
Maine TransNet
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New Mainers Public Health Initiative*
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Northern Light Health
Partnerships for Health
Penobscot Bay Medical Center
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Portland Division of Public Health
Rolfson Group
Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation
Saving Smiles of Maine*
Southern Maine Workers Center
St. Apollonia Dental Clinic*
State of Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services
State of Maine Legislators
State of Maine Office of MaineCare Services
Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
Sunrise Opportunities*
The Office of Senator King
The Opportunity Alliance*
United Way of Eastern Maine
United Way of Kennebec Valley
United Way of Mid Maine
United Way of York County
University of Maine at Augusta
University of New England
University of Southern Maine
Wabanaki Public Health*
Waldo Community Action Partners
Waldo County Dental Clinic
Waterville Community Dental Center*
Waterville Pediatrics

More than 120 schools and school districts across Maine
And more!

*2020 Grantees

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