Dear Children's Oral Health Partners,

Despite these challenging times, the past year has seen some exciting developments in the collective work towards our shared vision: a Maine where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease. Our challenge was daunting before COVID-19 and in many ways the pandemic has made things even worse. However, this Network has risen to the challenge, with a growing team of partners working together to bring meaningful, large-scale, lasting change to our oral health system.

Collaborative work in 2021 resulted in some real game-changers, even if it will take a few years to see their full impact. The following pages provide highlights on key policy changes accomplished this year as well as innovative and collaborative initiatives that are tackling the Network’s strategic priorities.

A note about our name: This Network is evolving and growing rapidly. To better reflect its full identity as a network rather than a single organization, our original name of “Maine Partnership for Children’s Oral Health” will now become “Children’s Oral Health Network of Maine.” You will find more on this evolution later in this annual report and on our new and improved website: www.mainecohn.org.

As always, thank you for your commitment to children’s oral health!

Becca Matusovich
Executive Director

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Impact of COVID-19 .................................. 2
- Founding Partnership Council .................. 3
- Network Initiatives and Action Teams.... 3
- Integrating Oral Health into Primary Care................................. 4
- Transforming Oral Health ........................................ 6
- Virtual Dental Home........................................ 7
- Increasing the Network’s Capacity ...... 8
- View Ahead.......................................................... 10
- Financial Report.............................................. 11
- Partner Organizations................................. 12

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2021 Annual Report available online:
www.mainecohn.org/what-we-do/comms
Impact of COVID-19 on Children’s Oral Health

The rate of preventive dental care is a good indicator of whether children have access to the care they need. COVID-19’s negative impact shows up starkly in the Maine Health Data Organization’s dental claims data. The 2021 data will not be available until late 2022 but, given the slow recovery from the pandemic, we expect to see an increase in treatment needs. In 2021, the Maine School Oral Health Program is seeing higher active decay rates than in prior years.

“Fewer schools participated in the School Oral Health Program in 2021 due to the extra burden of managing the pandemic. Our data is showing more children are going without dental preventive services and oral health problems are going unnoticed behind children’s masks. With the rise of decay seen over the past two years, we hope that more schools will opt back in to participate in SOHP for the 2022-2023 school year.”

– Sherry Laliberte, Program Manager: Maine CDC School Oral Health Program

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**Percentage of Insured Children Under Age 21 with at least one Preventive Dental Claim in 2016-2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Commercial Dental</th>
<th>MaineCare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maine Health Data Organization, All-Payer Claims Database. Analysis by USM Cutler Institute.

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**Percentage of Screened Students Presenting with Immediate Treatment Urgency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2018</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2019</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2019</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2020</td>
<td>2.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2020</td>
<td>4.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2021</td>
<td>4.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2021</td>
<td>4.97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* data is limited for Spring 2020 because the program had to halt service in March 2020

Source: Maine School Oral Health Program, December 2021
Founding Partnership Council

Over the last four years, the founding Partnership Council has completed its important task of establishing this network. With the Children’s Oral Health Network of Maine now in full bloom, the Council will hand off the governance of the Network to a new Steering Committee that will be formed during 2022. Kudos and many thanks to the founding members for a job well done!

Network Initiatives and Action Teams

The Network has identified three strategic priorities to achieve our shared vision:

- Integrate oral health into primary care,
- Expand prevention in school and community settings, and
- Transform our oral health system to serve all people in Maine.

To accomplish the work needed to address these priorities, Network Action Teams consisting of diverse partners meet, set priorities and develop solutions for system change to improve children’s oral health. With support from staff and project consultants, Action Team members develop projects to work on identified priorities, produce data reports, recruit funding to support these efforts, share lessons learned, and advocate for policy changes. The following sections outline in more detail the work of these Action Teams during 2021.

Kolawole Bankole
City of Portland Public Health Division* 2018-2019

Nicole Breton
Maine DHHS Rural Health and Primary Care 2018-2021

Deborah Deatrick
Maine Health* 2018-2019

Evelyn deFrees
The Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation* 2018-2019

Judith Feinstein
Maine Oral Health Coalition 2018-2021

Kalie Hess
Maine Primary Care Association* 2018-2019

Morgan Hynd
Maine Health Access Foundation* 2018-2019 & The Bingham Program 2019-2021

Dr. Rachel King
University of New England, College of Dental Medicine* 2018-2020

Dr. Dora Anne Mills
Maine Health 2019-2021

Dr. Christopher Pezzullo
Maine DHHS, MaineCare* 2018-2019

Maine Primary Care Association 2019-2021

Angela Westhoff
Maine Dental Association* 2018-2021

Carolyn Wollen
Betterment Foundation 2018-2021

*No longer with this organization
Integrating Oral Health into Primary Care

**Goal:** Every Maine child will have the oral health care and resources needed to reach kindergarten with a healthy mouth that has no active decay or other oral disease.

The Network’s Health Integration Action Team (HIAT) works to integrate oral health into primary care especially in the first years of life when many children are unable to establish a dental home. In 2021, the HIAT made progress on several initiatives:

**EXPANDING FROM THE FIRST TOOTH (FTFT)** Under the new leadership of Lyvia Gaewsky and the HIAT’s Health System Leadership Team, FTFT is helping more primary care providers build oral health assessments, fluoride varnish, parent/caregiver education, and referrals to a dentist into well-child visits for young children.

- The FTFT team maintains communication with a growing number of practices statewide (over 290 in 2021) and offers training and other implementation supports to participating practices.
- The new FTFT Toolkit provides a helpful resource for primary care practices, whether they are just starting to implement FTFT or have been for many years already.

**EMBEDDING DENTAL HYGIENE AND THE VIRTUAL DENTAL HOME (VDH) MODEL** in primary care settings. Led by Courtney Vannah of Medical Care Development, this HIAT project is developing an innovative prototype to build on the foundation of FTFT and integrate preventive dental care more comprehensively into the primary care medical home.

**RESEARCHING AND EXPLORING ORAL HEALTH INTEGRATION POLICY** to learn about successful models that have been effective in eight selected states. The findings from Maine Medical Association-Center for Quality Improvement’s Oral Health Integration Policy Project are helping the HIAT to identify policy priorities and potential projects to integrate oral health as a standard, reimbursable, and expected component of quality medical care in Maine.
Expanding Oral Health Services in Schools and Community Settings

Goal: Every Maine student, from pre-K to high school graduation, can receive the full range of oral health care services through a coordinated system—sustainably supported and data informed—that includes families, schools, dental providers, local organizations, and communities.

Throughout 2021, the Network’s School Action Team (SAT) convened planning meetings with partners including educators, school nurses, dental hygienists, dentists, parent advocates, funders, state program leaders, policy makers, and public health organizations. The ongoing pandemic and increasing barriers to care propel these partners to bring preventive oral health care to all students statewide in the place where they spend much of their time: school.

A “BLUEPRINT” FOR SCHOOL ORAL HEALTH:
The SAT is developing a “blueprint” for a comprehensive system of expanded preventive oral health services available for students in all public schools that will ultimately ensure all students have a dental home. More detailed work is now underway planning the components that must be in place to make this expansion possible including: workforce development, sustainable financing, a data system, oral health education tools, and a slate of policy changes to enable implementation.

ORAL HEALTH AND SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM:
Chronic and acute health conditions, including dental pain, impact school attendance and performance. The Network is partnering with the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Count Me In! - a non-profit with the mission of reducing chronic school absenteeism - on a pilot project to increase coordination among medical and oral health providers, schools and families, and to reduce the impact of poor oral health on learning.

See the full version
Transforming Oral Health to Serve all Maine People

Goal: A Maine that doesn’t rely on a dental “safety net,” where every person has access to the right care at the right place at the right time.

The Maine Oral Health Funders (MOHF), an affinity group of funders that first convened over 15 years ago, created a pooled funding initiative to promote strategic systemic changes focused on improved oral health care access and quality for all people in Maine. The Network is joining forces with the other MOHF members on this critical initiative.

Objectives include:

- Sustain, immediately and long-term, Maine’s non-profit dental centers.
- Grow the dental workforce to increase the system’s capacity especially the number of providers that provide care for patients with MaineCare.
- Increase access to quality oral health care and improved oral health outcomes for all Maine residents.

2021 highlights:

- Developing the Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance, composed of five non-profit dental centers in Maine, to build their sustainability and capacity.
- Engaging providers, community organizations, and insurers, in conversations to identify systemic changes necessary to improve access to quality oral health care for all.

[ See the full version ]
The Virtual Dental Home

A virtual dental home (VDH) is a community-based oral health care delivery system in which children become established patients with a dental practice but receive their preventive care and early intervention in school and primary care settings. Using teledentistry to link the dental provider team across locations, this model eliminates the key logistical barriers that many parents face in trying to get their children to a dental office for routine care. The VDH approach is based on a successful model developed by Dr. Paul Glassman of the University of the Pacific School of Dentistry and replicated in multiple states.

In 2021, Waterville Community Dental Center and the Jessie Albert Dental & Orthodontic Center have continued testing a pandemic-modified version of the VDH model. The pilot gathered steam in the fall when nearly 40 partners from diverse sectors - dentists and dental hygienists, dental center administrators, community action program staff, Head Start staff - attended introductory sessions to learn about the VDH model and opportunities to join the pilot. The VDH pilot now includes Local Implementation Teams of dental and Head Start partners covering nine of Maine’s 16 counties.

“Based on experience in other states, we predict that 75% of the care that children need can be delivered on-site in their school or childcare setting. Given the many challenges that families in Maine face in trying to establish dental homes and getting children to routine dental appointments, the VDH model has the potential to ensure that children can get the preventive care they need early and often.” —Emilie Knight, Project Coordinator, Maine Virtual Dental Home Pilot

The Maine VDH workshop series and learning collaborative for pilot sites, led by Dr. Paul Glassman, is set to begin in early 2022. This series, covering all aspects of VDH implementation, will support five local teams serving Head Start early education locations highlighted on the map at right. Additional partners will be exploring options for implementation in school and primary care settings.

We are grateful to the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs for the opportunity to participate in their Innovation Hub Replication Projects.
Increasing the Network’s Capacity to Work on Oral Health

We develop and provide tools focused on oral health equity, policy, data and communications to support Network members as they build their capacity to work on oral health issues.

EQUITY Ensuring all children and families have the opportunity and the tools for good oral health is at the heart of the Network’s shared mission, with health equity as a core principle. Projects in 2021 included:

- Maine Parent Federation partnered with the University of New England to develop training for parents of children with disabilities, with a goal of empowering them to maintain their child’s oral health both at home and in the provider’s office. Access the training slides here.
- Cross Cultural Community Services, Inc. began convening community partners and local dental providers in the Portland area. Discussions have focused particularly on barriers and opportunities for immigrant families to access dental care locally as well as preparing for MaineCare’s addition of comprehensive dental benefits for adults. This relationship-building and fact-finding will inform future training for providers and community health workers.

POLICY The Network’s top priority bill—LD 1501 (An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine sponsored by Rep. Lori Gramlich)—was voted unanimously out of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. It went on to passage through the full Maine House and Senate but was left unfunded by the Appropriations Committee. It was carried over into the 2022 legislative session where the work continues.

MaineCare’s rate system review in 2021 led to noteworthy administrative policy changes with input from many Network members about dental rates. The dental rate changes subsequently built into the Governor’s biennial budget will go into effect July 1, 2022. Importantly, dental services were identified as a top priority, with a particular focus on ensuring fair rates for preventive care.

The Oral Health Policy Advocates First convened by the Network in 2018, this group continues to meet at the beginning of each legislative session to share information and identify opportunities to collaborate on key oral health policies. In 2021, partners worked to pass several bills that drive positive change in the oral health landscape in Maine. In particular, Maine Equal Justice provided tremendous leadership to accomplish passage of a comprehensive adult dental benefit in MaineCare. Many Network partners are also participating in the MaineCare Advisory Committee’s Dental Sub-committee, which is planning for launch of the benefit in July 2022.
DATA The Network analyzes and disseminates data to illustrate the challenges in Maine’s oral health system, drive program development, and help policy makers understand the systemic challenges and potential solutions. Examples of such work in 2021 include the following:

- Partnering with the University of Southern Maine’s Cutler Institute to analyze and update the Network’s annual data brief.
- Incorporating dental measures into data portals produced by the Maine Community Health Needs Assessment and KidsCount.
- Sponsoring an economic analysis to project cost savings from the MaineCare dental benefit to include adults, in partnership with The Bingham Program, Maine Equal Justice, and the Health Policy Institute of the American Dental Association.
- Collaborating with From the First Tooth staff to create a snapshot of what dental access looks like for children with MaineCare looking to establish a dental home.

COMMUNICATIONS Network members collectively work to promote several key messages: oral health is essential to overall health, oral health inequities persist for many children in Maine, and preventive care and early intervention can set children up for good oral health for life. In 2021, Network communication tools included oral health infographics, fact sheets, and collaborative letters to the editor to elevate attention to oral health issues.

- **Website:** Network partners contributed to the development of the new Network website, due to launch in early 2022: www.mainecohn.org.
- **The Network e-newsletter** helps partners stay connected and informed about opportunities for engagement with Action Teams and advocacy efforts.
- **Letters to the editor and op-eds:** In 2021, Network partners contributed letters and op-eds in media outlets around the state to support LD 1501, An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine, and helped raise awareness of the need for access to oral health prevention care for Maine children.
The View Ahead

In order to better reflect our network approach, what was originally known as the Partnership for Children’s Oral Health will now be called the Children’s Oral Health Network of Maine. Along with this new name, we are deepening and strengthening the governance structure of the Network.

In 2022, the founding Council will hand off the Network’s leadership functions to a new Steering Committee. By expanding the Network’s leadership roles to include a wider range of partners and formalizing engagement with various sectors we can ensure that our initiatives and vision spread more broadly across the state, maximizing our Network’s power to make lasting systems change.

In 2022 we will be supporting the Network in the following initiatives and projects:

- Expanding the Virtual Dental Home (VDH) pilot and promoting teledentistry as a means to expand access to dental care.

- Working through the legislative process to support expansion of school oral health services and Maine CDC staff capacity through our priority bill: LD 1501, An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine.

- Building a workforce development plan, key policy proposals, and a financial model for implementation of the School Oral Health blueprint.

- Assisting with roll-out of the MaineCare Adult Dental Benefit which will cover comprehensive oral health care for adults over age 21 with MaineCare for the first time ever.

- Developing and testing the Health Integration Action Team’s prototype for embedding preventive dental care and the VDH model into primary care settings.

- Creating a data dashboard to track the status of children’s oral health and the impacts of the Network’s collective action.

Check out our new website at www.mainecohn.org!
2021 Financial Report

The Children’s Oral Health Network is fortunate to have core funding to support our small staff and the costs of operating the 501(c)3 organization that provides backbone support for the network. We recruit additional project funding to pass through to partner organizations to support their capacity to work on our shared mission. We also help partners develop their own grant proposals for Action Team initiatives.

“"We are excited that the Children’s Oral Health Network has continued to deepen its work on children’s oral health despite the pandemic, and we are encouraged by the progress made with our network partners toward the goal that all Maine children grow up free from preventable dental disease.”

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

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Thanks To Our 2021 Funders

Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation*
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Betterment Fund*
Maine Community Foundation*

Maine Health Access Foundation
Proctor & Gamble Foundation
Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation

*Core operational funders
Partner Organizations

The Children’s Oral Health Network is only as strong as those who join forces to get the work done. Our sincere gratitude to the growing list of partners in Maine who are working together to make sure all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

Advancing Oral Health in the Safety Net
Aroostook Community Action Program
Betterment Fund
Bingham Program
Catholic Charities of Maine, Jessie Albert Dental and Orthodontic Center
Community Clinical Services
Community Concepts, Inc.
Community Dental
Consumers for Affordable Health Care
Count ME In!
Cross Cultural Community Services
Greater Portland Health
Hanley Center for Health Leadership
Health and Education Communication Consultants
Helping Hands with Heart
In Her Presence
Island Dental
Kennebec Valley Community Action Program
Kennebec Valley Family Dentistry
Klingenestein Philanthropies
Knox County Dental Clinic
Lincoln County Dental
Maine Access Immigrant Network
Maine Association of School Nurses
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Maine Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
Maine Children’s Alliance
Maine Community Foundation
Maine Congressional Delegation
Maine Dental Association
Maine Dental Health Out-Reach, Inc.
Maine Dental Hygiene Association
Maine Department of Education
Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Developmental Disabilities Council
Maine Equal Justice
Maine Health Access Foundation
Maine Medical Association Center for Quality Improvement
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 Nurses Association
Maine School Oral Health Program
MaineGeneral
MaineHealth
Mainely Teeth
Market Decisions
Medical Care Development
Midcoast Maine Community Action
New England Rural Health Association
New Mainers Public Health Initiative
North Theory Ventures
Northeast Delta Dental
Northern Light Health
Partnerships for Health
Pivot Point Inc.
Portland Division of Public Health
Proctor & Gamble Foundation
Promise Early Education Center
Root Cellar
RSU 13
Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation
Saving Smiles of Maine
Southern Kennebec Child Development Corp.
St. Apollonia Dental Clinic
Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
Sunrise Opportunities
The Opportunity Alliance
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

And more!