

Children's Oral Health
Network of Maine

2024 IMPACT REPORT





The 2024 COHN Steering Committee: L-R, Standing Row: Dr. Albert Abena, University of New England College of Dental Medicine; Dr. Kailee Jorgenson, Mainely Teeth; Kalie Hess, COHN; Sanaa Abduljabbar, Maine Access Immigrant Network; Ayla Burke, Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation; Deqa Dhalac, Cross Cultural Community Services; Toni Goncalves, Cross Cultural Community Services; Becca Matusovich, COHN. Seated Row: Dee Kerry, Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Kate Christiansen, Maine Center for Disease Control; Sarah Lewis, Maine Access Immigrant Network; Morgan Hynd, The Bingham Program; Tracey Jowett, University of Maine at Augusta.

Not Pictured: Lyvia Gaewsky, From the First Tooth; Sherry Laliberte, Simply Smiles

What a year it has been! In 2024, the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN) fully embraced its identity as a field catalyst—an organization driving systemic change by fostering collaboration, innovation, and alignment among diverse stakeholders. This year marked a pivotal shift for COHN, as we transitioned from a fledgling network to a more mature one, with multiple collaborative initiatives yielding meaningful impact across the state. COHN members are increasingly recognized as thought leaders, advancing the Network's values and goals by serving on advisory committees, presenting at state and national conferences, and seizing opportunities to expand the Network's influence.

Recognizing this progress in our development as a force for oral health systems change, COHN leaders spent much of 2024 solidifying the Network's core identity to align resources and guide the next chapter of our work. This included crafting a mission statement:

The Children's Oral Health Network improves children's health by mobilizing partners and communities to transform oral health care in Maine.

Behind the scenes, our Board of Directors and Steering Committee worked diligently to articulate our theory of change and refine the Network's strategies. These efforts have produced a clear framework for demonstrating the progress Network partners are making toward our shared vision: a Maine where all children grow up free from preventable dental disease.

In previous years, our annual reports have highlighted the initiatives we are nurturing. This year, we focus on the collective results of the Network's activities. From expanding access to preventive care to advocating for sustainable policy reforms, this Network proves the transformative power of trust, strategic collaboration, aligned resources, and a shared vision.

Together, we are building a future where every child in Maine grows up free from preventable dental disease. Thank you for being an essential part of this journey!



Priorities

Integrating Oral Health into Primary Care
 Bringing Oral Health Care into Schools & Community Settings
 Funding & Sustaining the Oral Health System of the Future
 Expanding & Diversifying the Workforce of the Future

Programs & Projects

Maine Dental Connection	Fostering Systems Change
Dental Steps for ME	Oral Health Industry Partnership
From the First Tooth	Oral Health Equity Collaborative
Maine Oral Health Funders Transformation Initiative	Saving Smiles

Partners engaged in COHN initiatives and workgroups

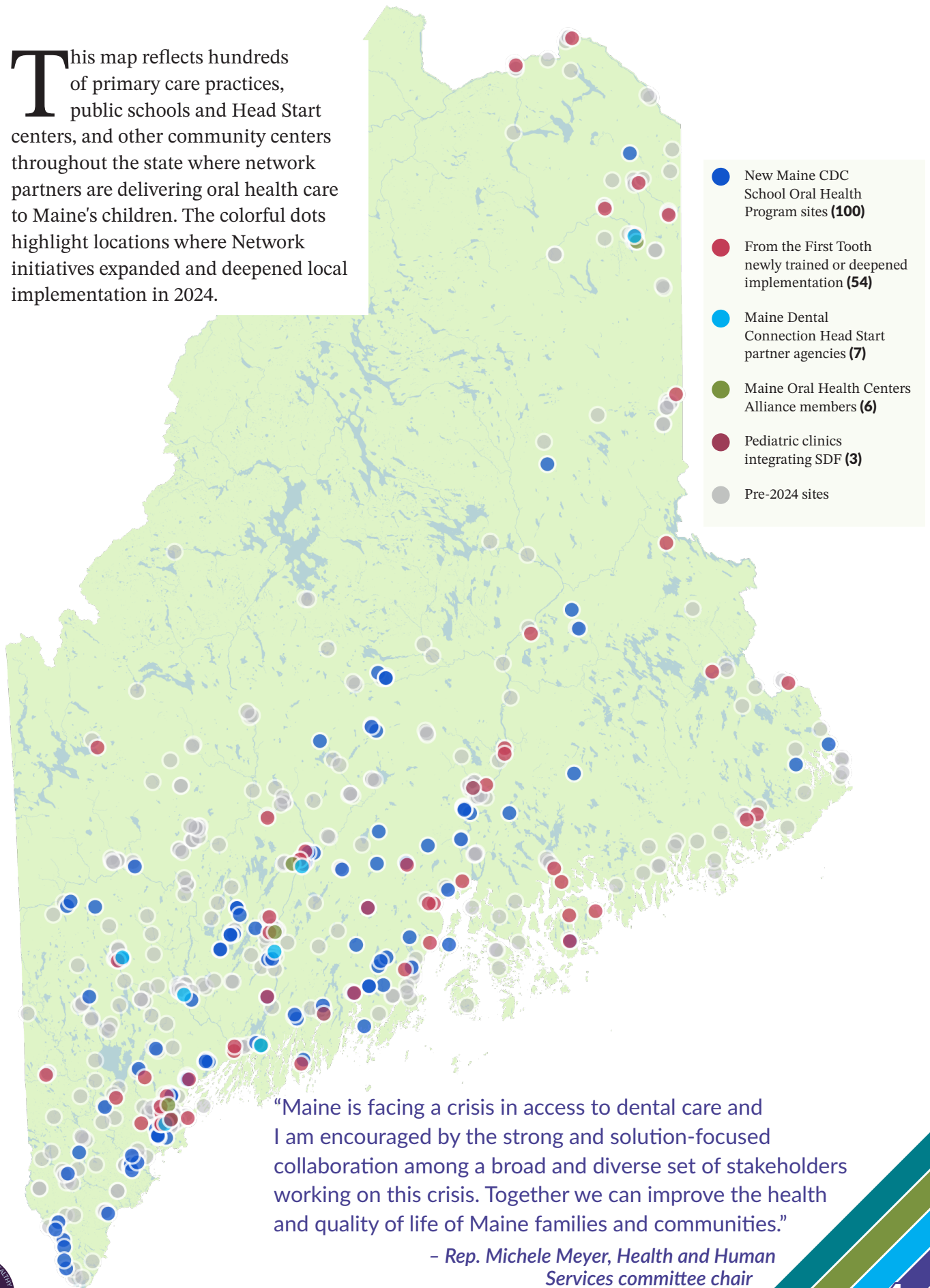
Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program	Midcoast Maine Community Action
Aroostook County Action Program	New Mainers Public Health Initiative
Bingham Program	Northeast Telehealth Resource Center
Community Concepts Inc.	Northern Light Health
Community Dental	Partnerships for Health
Cross Cultural Community Services	Penobscot Community Health Care
Cumberland County Public Health	Promise Early Education
Disability Rights Maine	Sadie & Harry Davis Foundation
Dr. Harry E. Davis Pediatrics at Mercy Northern Light	Simply Smiles
From the First Tooth	Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation
Greater Portland Health	St. Apollonia Dental Clinic
Jessie Albert Dental and Orthodontic Center, Catholic Charities of Maine	The Opportunity Alliance
Kennebec Valley Community Action Program	University of Maine at Augusta
Kennebec Valley Family Dentistry	University of New England
Klingenstein Philanthropies	University of Southern Maine, Catherine Cutler Institute
MaineGeneral	Virtual Dental Home Consulting, Inc.
MaineHealth	Waterville Community Dental Center
Maine Access Immigrant Network	Youth Leadership Advisory Team

For a complete list of COHN partner organizations, please visit our website.



Maine Primary Care Association
 Maine Public Health Association
 Mainely Teeth
 MCD Global Health

This map reflects hundreds of primary care practices, public schools and Head Start centers, and other community centers throughout the state where network partners are delivering oral health care to Maine's children. The colorful dots highlight locations where Network initiatives expanded and deepened local implementation in 2024.



"Maine is facing a crisis in access to dental care and I am encouraged by the strong and solution-focused collaboration among a broad and diverse set of stakeholders working on this crisis. Together we can improve the health and quality of life of Maine families and communities."

- Rep. Michele Meyer, Health and Human Services committee chair





Primary Care Integration

See the story *Integrating SDF in Primary Care* (p. 14) to learn more.

221 primary care practices implementing or trained by From the First Tooth (FTFT)

65 primary care physicians learned to apply Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF)

Spruce the Dental Health Moose dental kits distributed to over **2,500** families through **20** practices

3 primary care practices began actively offering SDF for pediatric patients



School-based Initiatives

See the *Cumberland County* story (p. 15) about an exciting collaborative pilot.

Maine CDC School Oral Health Program

2023-2024 school year:

229 schools visited

13,287 screenings completed

30% of children had untreated decay

2024-2025 school year (so far):

100+ new schools have enrolled across all 16 Maine counties!

4,321 children have received screenings and/or fluoride varnish

29% of children had untreated decay



Maine Dental Connection 2023-2024 school year

See the *MDC in Aroostook County* story (p. 9) for more highlights.

5 implementing Dental Practices

7 participating Head Start Agencies, **50** Head Start sites in **9** counties

621 teledentistry exams

646 patients served across **773** visits

93% of children served had MaineCare coverage

283 caries arrest treatments

89% of patients were able to continue care at community sites without needing to travel to the dental office*

624 cleanings

*This rate is based on a subset of 158 patients for which full treatment data was tracked.



Workforce Development

See the story *Growing Maine's Oral Health Workforce* (p.11) for a closer look.

29 students completed the "RDH to IPDH: Transitioning Registered Dental Hygienists to the Integrated Independent Practice of Dental Hygiene" course at UMA this summer

8 people completed the Oral Health Navigation (OHN) modules in the first beta test of the OHN Learning Series





The Mainely Teeth team sets up for a mobile clinic at Fort Knox for a family fun day event hosted by Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine.

The Fostering Systems Change project is a collaborative effort involving MCD Global Health, the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Spurwink Services, MaineGeneral Edmund Ervin Pediatric Center, Penobscot Community Health Center, Mainely Teeth, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM), the Youth Leadership Action Team (YLAT), and DHHS Office of Child and Family Services. Funded by CareQuest Institute, this project focused on connecting children involved with the foster care system to oral health care. In 2024, mobile clinics took place at several AFFM and YLAT events, and some children were able to get all of their immediate needs met by a dentist and mobile trailer returning for follow-up care. Additionally, partners have designed a process for teledentistry exams, triage, and streamlined referrals as part of the comprehensive medical exams that take place when a child enters foster care. This process will be field-tested in 2025 in one region, and then refined and expanded to other regions.



“As a social worker, I’ve seen firsthand how a lack of access to oral health care can impact a child’s confidence, health, and ability to thrive. I’m proud to stand with the Children’s Oral Health Network of Maine as we work to create lasting, systemic change for our kids.”

– Rep. Lori Gramlich, Assistant Majority Leader,
Sponsor of COHN legislative bills since 2017

Throughout this year, Cross Cultural Community Services (CCCS) provided training to oral health care providers in the Greater Portland Oral Health Equity Collaborative to support equity for all and address the disparities faced by marginalized populations. Participants in this training included Preble Street, Community Dental, Greater Portland Health, University of New England Oral Health Center, Mainely Teeth, and Maine Access Immigrant Network.



L-R: Liz Blackwell-Moore, Cumberland County Public Health; Minou Jones, Making It Count Community Development Corporation; Morgan Hynd, The Bingham Program; Carol Kelly, Pivot Point Inc.

In September, CCCS hosted the first Oral Health Equity Conference in Maine, and 60 people attended, including 20 people who were new to the organization’s work. Minou Jones, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Making It Count Community Development Corporation, gave the keynote address and discussed the impacts of marketing flavored tobacco products

to youth. The conference opened up key dialogues about oral health providers, the needs of the community, and social determinants of health.

One very exciting project supported by CCCS’ state grant for the Oral Health Equity Collaborative was the development of a regular ongoing dental clinic at the Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN) offices in Portland, through a partnership with Mainely Teeth. MAIN’s Community Health Workers are scheduling clients who need dental care to receive triage screenings with Mainely Teeth staff at MAIN’s office and providing the wraparound case management services to help them get established as patients with Mainely Teeth.



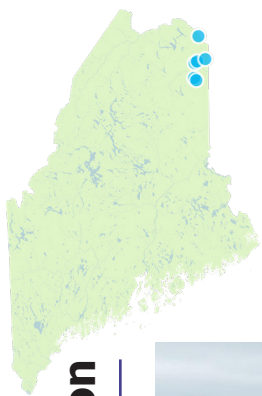
One of the Network's core beliefs is that delivering oral health care to children early and often, in the places where they already spend their time, will improve their health outcomes. The stories that follow capture the impact of this work, showing where and how Network partners are transforming oral health care for children across our state.

"Public health works best when people can easily get preventive care in places they know and trust. Maine CDC is very committed to collaborating as a partner in this Network to build more options for families to get the oral health care they need."

- Dr. Puthiery Va, Director of the Maine CDC



Dr. Puthiery Va, Director, and Kate Christiansen, Oral Health Program Manager, of the Maine CDC at the 2024 Annual Network Gathering. We were delighted to give Dr. Va this warm COHN welcome and to hear her remarks, in which she expressed her shared enthusiasm for community-based care.



Dr. Norma Desjardins (far left) and Julie Tucci (far right) of St. Apollonia Dental Clinic welcome Emilie Knight and Becca Matusovich (center) to Aroostook County

Dr. Norma Desjardins, founding Executive Director of St. Apollonia Dental Clinic (St. Apollonia) in Presque Isle, has always envisioned expanding access to essential oral health care beyond the dental office. Since its founding in 2009, St. Apollonia has provided affordable, quality dental care to children and adolescents, and since fall 2022, has been an integral partner in the Maine Dental Connection (MDC), Maine’s adaptation of the Virtual Dental Home (VDH) model.

As an early adopter of the VDH model, Dr. Desjardins and her team implemented the program at four Aroostook County Head Start sites in partnership with the Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP). Between the program’s first and second years, St. Apollonia’s Head Start MDC enrollment increased by 46%, providing a full dental home for 26 students and keeping 73% of these children healthy in their community settings, saving space in the dental office to see other kids needing care.

In 2023, the program expanded organically to Caribou Community School, where school nurse Traci Roberts led efforts to connect students with on-site care. In



L-R: Emilie Knight, Traci Roberts, Julie Tucci, and Becca Matusovich tour the dental room at Caribou Community School.



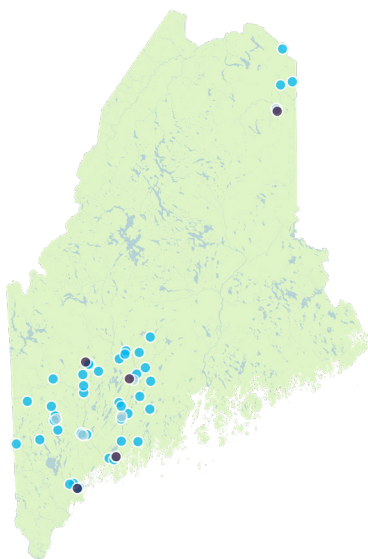


July, COHN team members visited Aroostook County to facilitate a focus group with the Head Start pilot's dedicated champions, and they were thrilled to tour the dental room at Caribou Community School. Inspired by Caribou's success, Limestone Community School is now building a dental room to launch its MDC program. These expansions have increased St. Apollonia's capacity to serve more patients by streamlining workflows and freeing up office-based resources.

Between 2022 to 2024, the MDC pilot has supported five non-profit dental centers in partnering with seven Head Start agencies to reach children at 50 locations across 9 counties. As this phase concluded in 2024, partners reported improvements in clinical calibration and greater family awareness of oral health. Statewide, MDC programs achieved a 15% growth in enrollment from the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year. The pilot's success has laid a strong foundation for continued growth into more Head Start regions and schools in 2025 and beyond, ensuring more Maine children have access to vital oral health care.



We are grateful for the partnership and friendship of Dr. Paul Glassman, developer of the Virtual Dental Home model, and we enjoyed celebrating the success of the MDC pilot with him and many initiative partners at the Network Gathering this summer. This two-year pilot was made possible with a Congressionally Directed Spending grant secured through the efforts of Senator Collins, Senator King, and Representative Pingree.



- Dental Clinic Partners (5)
- Head Start Partner Agencies (7)
- Head Start Sites (51)

Aroostook, featured in this impact story, is one of nine counties around the state with active Maine Dental Connection Head Start implementations. The map at left shows all of the partner sites statewide. Click this map to view all of the reports from the Maine Dental Connection initiative, including regional and statewide pilot outcomes. To learn even more about the Maine Dental Connection, and to explore the interactive online toolkit, please visit www.themainedentalconnection.org.

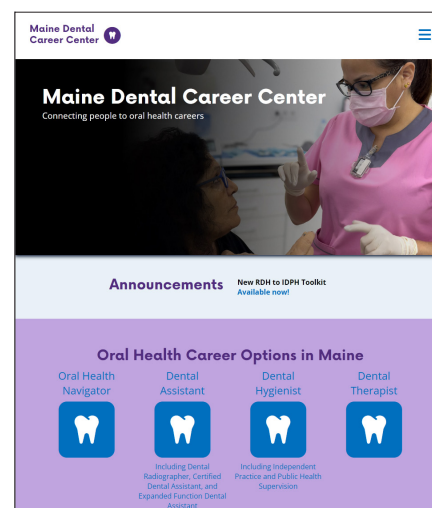
“Partnering with the Network has been a valuable experience for the MDA. Working with all of the groups involved with COHN has allowed for the first time a more cohesive approach in addressing all of the challenges Maine is currently experiencing in oral health, including workforce shortages which contribute to the continued access challenges for all of Maine’s people.”

– *Therese Cahill, Executive Director of the Maine Dental Association*

Maine dental hygienists have the authority to practice in a wide range of settings, from clinical sites such as dental and primary care offices, to community-based sites such as nursing homes, head start centers, and schools. In response to hygienists’ requests for support to pursue independent practice in community settings, COHN’s Oral Health Industry Partnership grant from the Maine Department of Labor’s State Workforce Board supported the development of the Maine RDH to IPDH Toolkit. This free online resource, launched in the fall of 2024 by MCD Global Health, was developed in tandem with a new course launched by the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) Dental Hygiene Program last summer. The 7-week course, titled “RDH to IPDH: Transitioning Registered Dental Hygienists to the Integrated Independent Practice of Dental Hygiene,” presented dental hygienists with knowledge and skills to deliver community-based care.

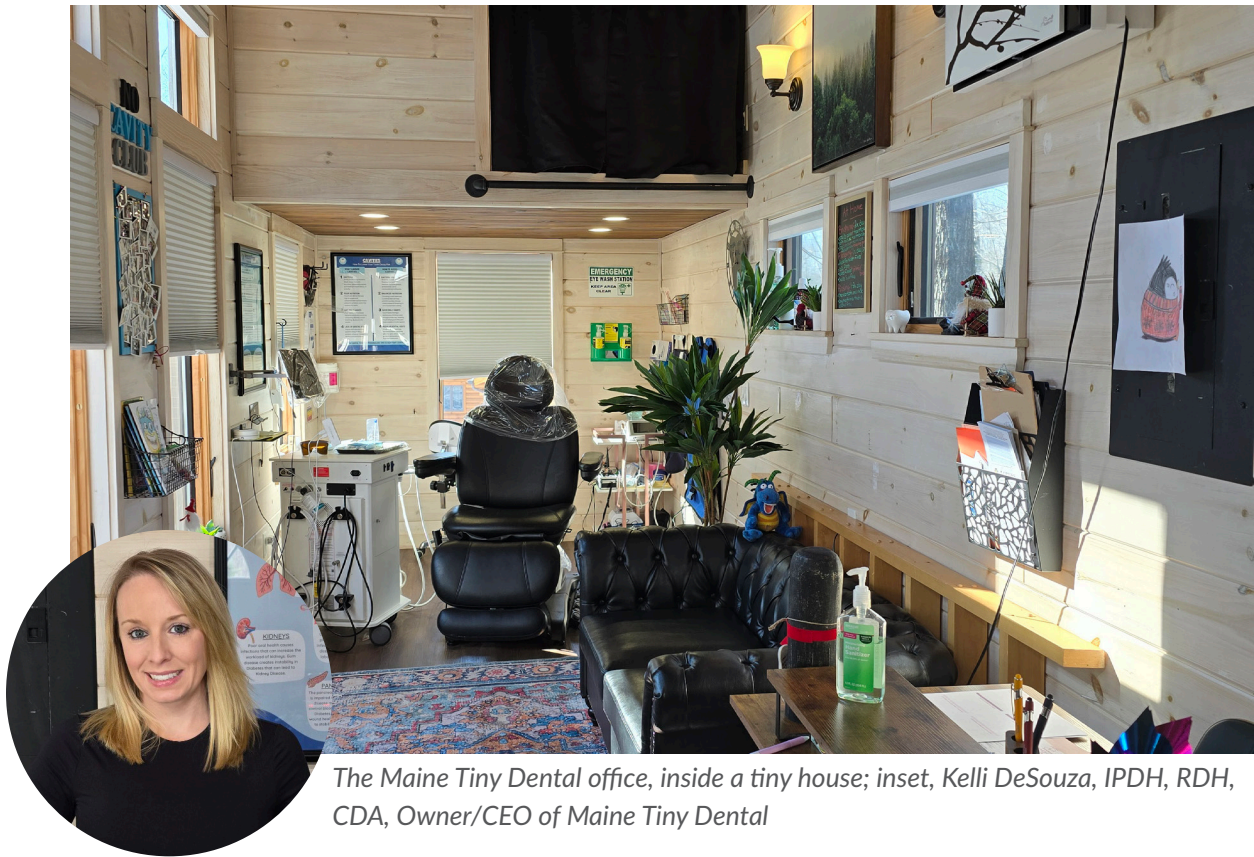
Kelli DeSouza, one of the 29 hygienists who completed this course, affirmed that the RDH to IPDH Toolkit and the UMA course provided participants with “so much information about what kind of practice we might want to have and how to establish that. [They] gave us all the options and allowed us to see benefits and challenges for each of them.” She already had her independent practice authority prior to enrolling in

the course, and these comprehensive resources supplied answers to the last outstanding questions she had before launching her own practice in August.



In 2024, COHN partners, led by the Maine Dental Connection and the Oral Health Industry Partnership, launched the [Maine Dental Career Center website](#). This resource is the first of its kind in Maine for career exploration in the dental field! The website features the [Maine RDH to IPDH Toolkit](#) noted in this story.





The Maine Tiny Dental office, inside a tiny house; inset, Kelli DeSouza, IPDH, RDH, CDA, Owner/CEO of Maine Tiny Dental

Throughout her career, DeSouza had worked with a wide range of dentists and specialists, and this experience shaped her vision for an independent hygiene practice. In 2021, she relocated to Franklin County and quickly became aware of her neighbors' struggles to access dental care, and this inspired her to transform her tiny house into a dental hygienist's office. She opened Maine Tiny Dental with almost 200 patients, and in a few short months, that number quadrupled. "After working in private practice for so many years, the depth and extent of the need in rural areas surprised me." Now, in addition to routine preventive care, she also focuses on assessing acute oral health needs, offers Silver Diamine Fluoride and protective restorations, and coordinates referrals for advanced care.

Looking forward, UMA plans to keep the RDH to IPDH course in its special topics rotation, the RDH to IPDH Toolkit remains a vital source for hygienists statewide, and the Maine Dental Hygienists' Association has formed an IPDH subcommittee to support hygienists who want to pursue community-based practice. It's inspiring to see independent hygienists like DeSouza and her UMA classmates stepping up to increase access to community-based care. With guidance from experienced IPDH leaders like Courtney Vannah of MCD Global Health and Tracey Jowett of UMA—who played a key role in developing these vital new resources—they are transforming oral health in Maine.

“Historically, non-profit dental centers were stuck working individually to survive in a system that was not designed for our financial sustainability. Forming the Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance, with the support of COHN and the Maine Oral Health Funders, helped us survive the pandemic. *It was also a critical catalyst to move us beyond basic survival tactics to inventive new approaches to care.* Working together to develop community-based care models that build on our communities’ strengths, we are now providing innovative and sustainable care to better serve more people in Maine.”

– Dr. Barbara Covey, Board Chair, Waterville Community Dental Center, and Vice President, MOHCA

The Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance (MOHCA) is a unique collaborative network that unites leaders from non-profit oral health centers and other statewide partners to provide mutual support, and strengthen capacity and sustainability of the oral health centers while increasing access to quality care.

At their annual meeting earlier this year, MOHCA members began brainstorming about how to create and fill the role of a centralized shared Specialist Referral Coordinator, a first for oral health care in Maine. Over the course of a few short months, that idea has evolved into a full-fledged, grant-funded role. This newly hired Specialist Referral Coordinator will work with all six MOHCA members to help improve access to specialists who can meet patients’ complex needs, and to strategically coordinate referrals across the few dental specialists who take MaineCare. The hope is that a centralized approach to meeting this demand can better ensure timely access to care, support the dental specialists who continue to serve people with MaineCare, and encourage more specialists to enroll.

Over these last five years, MOHCA has become a force for advocating for equitable oral health access in the legislature and through ongoing engagement with groups such as the Dental Subcommittee of the MaineCare Advisory Council. Their commitment to their missions to serve the most underserved and to work in collaboration rather than competition has made MOHCA a trusted and important voice in the oral health policy arena.

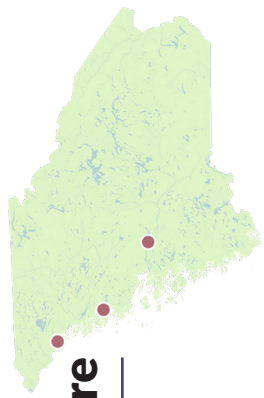
2020-2021 Members came together as a group during the COVID-19 pandemic and met biweekly to strategize ways to maintain access to care and keep the state’s non-profit dental clinics afloat amidst the constant changes and challenges to daily operations.

2022 The Maine CDC, New England Rural Health Association, and Maine Oral Health Funders supported a strategic planning process to formalize the Alliance, and representatives of the five large standalone non-profit dental clinics—Community Dental, Jessie Albert Dental and Orthodontic Center, Kennebec Valley Family Dentistry, St. Apollonia Dental Clinic, Waterville Community Dental Center—worked with a consultant to develop a charter and strategic plan.

2023 MOHCA members finalized the bylaws and added a leadership structure.

2024 MOHCA experienced growth, adding Mainely Teeth as a new large non-profit oral health center, and began to think more proactively about opportunities for collaboration and advocacy, creating an environment of shared problem-solving and collective action.





“SDF has been a wonderful resource in primary care. We are so happy to be able to offer this low-cost, effective, easy treatment to arrest caries, especially when patients do not have easy (or any) access to pediatric dentistry. Patients are very receptive and accepting of it, as it’s quick, painless, and useful.”

– Dr. Melissa Keepert, Pediatrician, MaineHealth Primary Care Damariscotta

The Health Integration Action Team has been hearing from an increasing number of primary care providers seeking to learn about Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF) as a tool to stop the progression of dental disease in their patients. Following a workshop led by pediatric dentists Dr. Nick Pray and Dr. Steve Mills at the annual conference of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, in 2024, three primary care practices pioneered adding SDF to their First Tooth services:

- MaineHealth Primary Care Pediatrics Portland
- MaineHealth Primary Care Damariscotta
- Northern Light Family Medicine and Residency - Bangor

MaineHealth Primary Care Pediatric Portland held eight “Tooth Tuesday” clinics in 2024. During these clinics, patients received oral health prevention education, a Spruce the Dental Health Moose oral health kit, fluoride varnish application, and SDF treatment. If a child had advanced tooth decay that could not be addressed at the oral health clinic, providers worked diligently to connect those patients with a local dental provider.

“The ability to take effective action for our patients with dental caries at the point of care in the office has been dramatic. To be able to slow the advancement of the caries to the point of not needing dental extraction is a clinical game changer for patients, pediatricians, and the community of dental care.”

– Dr. Laura Blaisdell, Pediatrician, MaineHealth Barbara Bush Children’s Pediatric Clinic

Right, Dr. Laura Blaisdell and Dr. Brian Youth learn to apply SDF at the 2024 Maine AAP Conference



MaineHealth Primary Care Damariscotta piloted a different workflow, embedding SDF treatment into the well-child visit. If a child was identified as having active caries, physicians would provide oral health education, an oral health kit, fluoride varnish application, and SDF treatment as part of that child’s visit.



Physicians’ desire to meet their patients’ oral health needs is admirable. Training more primary care providers to use SDF in the coming years is a critical component to addressing the oral health crisis we face in Maine.

"This school year has started off really, really strong. We have two dedicated hygienists that are full-time in Cumberland County, and we have six more that will work throughout the county occasionally, and they're all booked in the schools providing screenings, cleanings, fluoride, and SDF for the whole school year. For the schools that we were already working with, we basically doubled or tripled the number of days from last year that we'll be working in their school this year. It's pretty wild, but amazing!"

- Abby Payson, Director of Off-Site Care, Mainely Teeth

In Cumberland County, more than half of the 56,000 children ages 1-18 lack access to preventive dental care through a traditional dental home. To address this gap, the Cumberland County Public Health Department committed three years of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to a collaborative effort among local oral health providers, the Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program, MCD Global, Partnerships for Health, and COHN. Together, we are building a sustainable, school-based oral health service infrastructure to provide prevention, early intervention, and restorative care to students, regardless of their access to traditional dental care.

When the project launched in July 2023, 42 of the county's 89 public K-12 schools had existing relationships with one of the Project's dental partners to offer some level of school oral health services. By January 2025, 20 additional schools have joined the initiative, bringing the total to 62 participating schools - meaning 75% of public schools in the county are now offering comprehensive oral health services! As implementation continues, the number of students receiving care grows steadily.

This project serves as a model for comprehensive school-based oral health services, with COHN partners preparing to share the blueprint for this care delivery model with other counties that are interested in improving oral health access for their students.

Cumberland County School Oral Health Project 2023-2024 school year:

293

clinic days

2390 students

receiving preventive
oral health care services

1 out of 3

students served
needed treatment:

497

received minimally invasive
cavity treatments onsite

343

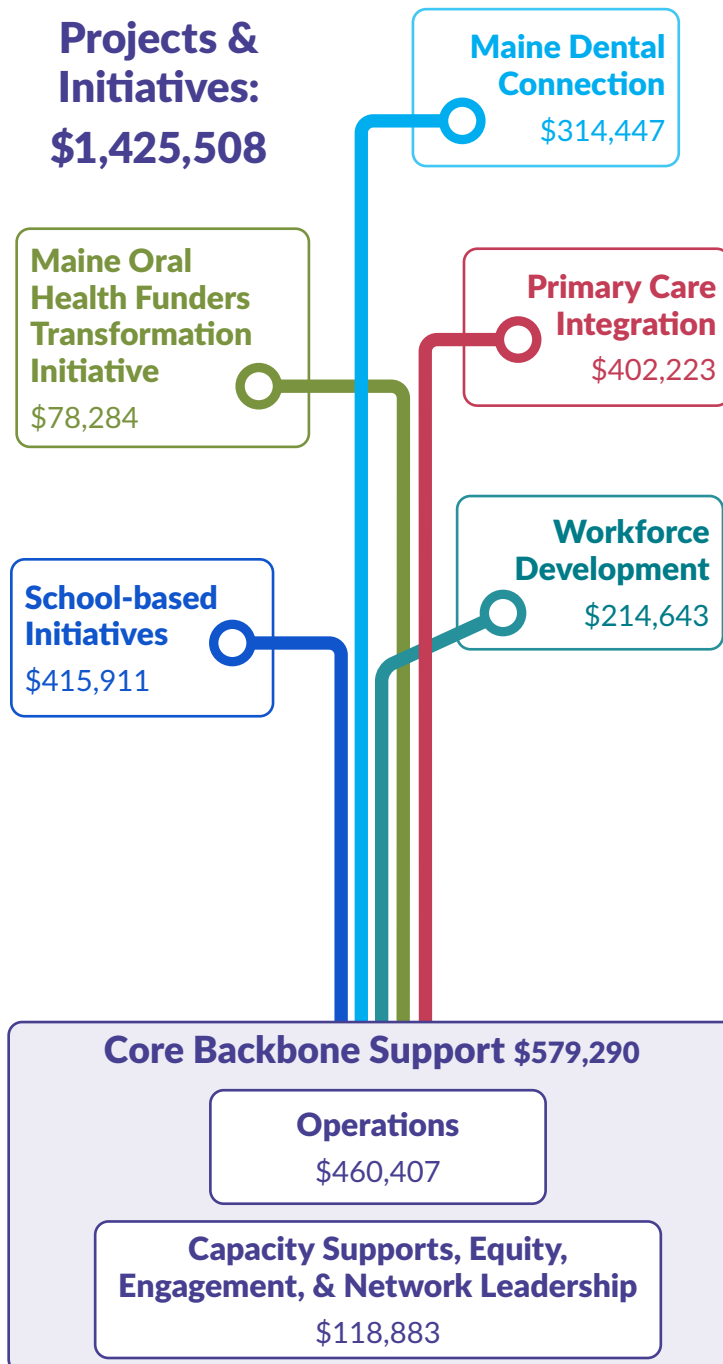
needed follow-up care at a
dental office, with about 1/3
needing to see a specialist
for complex care needs



“COHN’s role in the Maine Oral Health Funders has been key to figuring out how we can better invest our funding collectively in systems-change solutions that create real and lasting results. We are proud to be part of an innovative new approach to funding oral health access in Maine.”

–Frank Martinez Nocito, Senior Program Officer,
Maine Health Access Foundation

How COHN Funding was Spent in 2024:



We are grateful to the following funders for making all this work possible in 2024!

Projects and Initiatives:

US Health Resources and Services Administration (*Congressionally Directed Spending and Rural Northern Border Region Outreach Program*)

Maine Department of Labor State Workforce Board (*American Rescue Plan Act, State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*)

Cumberland County Public Health (*American Rescue Plan Act, State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*)

Maine Health Access Foundation

CareQuest Institute

Northeast Delta Dental

Northern Light Foundation

Our Change Foundation

Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation

Simmons Foundation

Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust

National Association of Dental Plans Foundation

Core Backbone Support:

Sadie and Harry Davis Foundation

Betterment Fund

Donations from individuals and organizations

