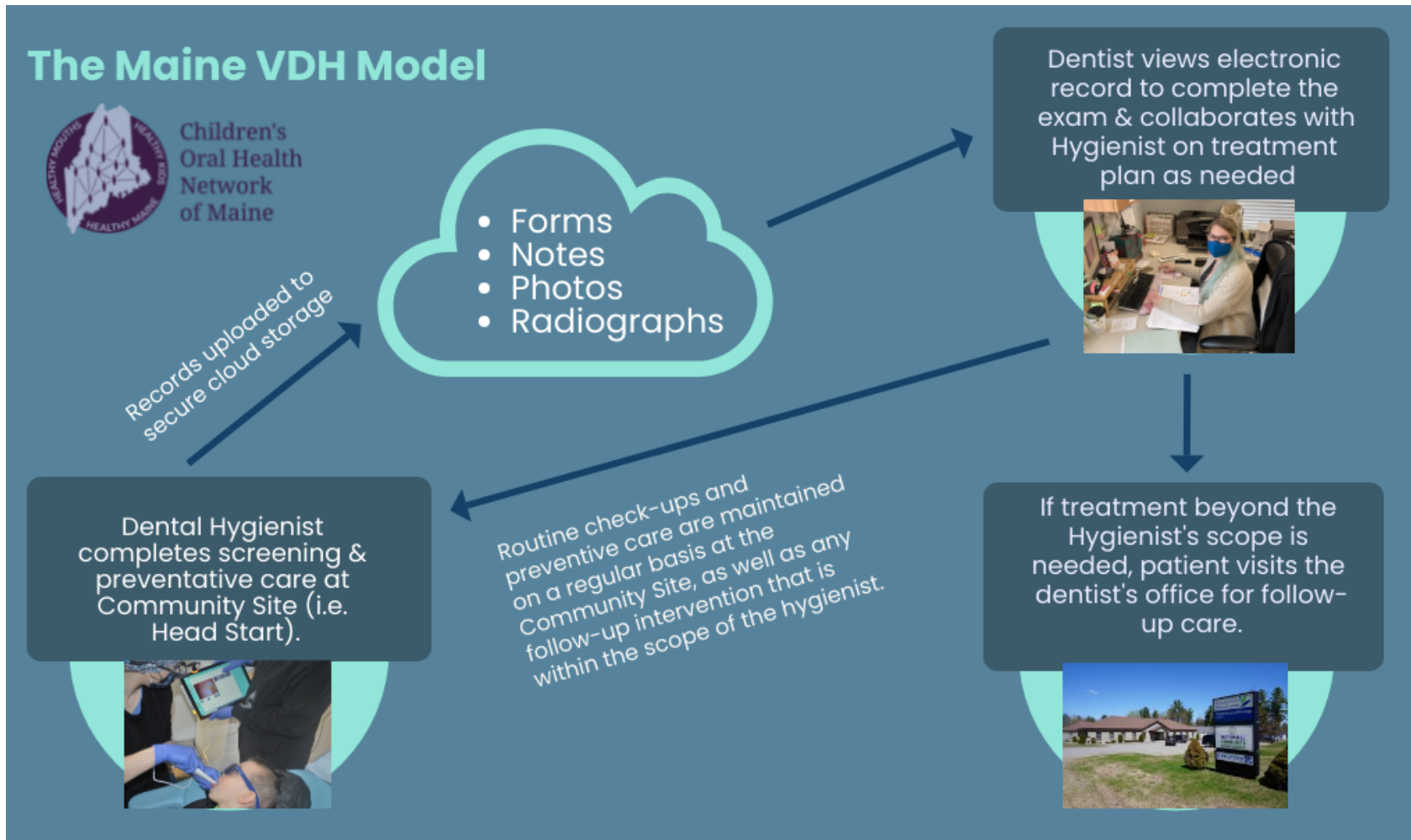


Bringing the Virtual Dental Home model to ME: a better way to reach more kids!

What is the Virtual Dental Home (VDH) model & what does it accomplish?

The 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. Licensed public health and independent practice dental hygienists deliver the community-based services using telehealth technology to share photos, images, and assessment results with dentists at an office location. The collaborating dentist will complete the exam remotely and create a treatment plan for follow-up care as needed. 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. The VDH model uses teledentistry to link the provider team across locations. This ensures patients receive comprehensive coordinated care, and maximizes everyone's time and resources. 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.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists defines the dental home as “the ongoing relationship between the dentist and the patient, inclusive of all aspects of oral health care delivered in a comprehensive, continuously accessible, coordinated, and family-centered way.” Maine's VDH project strives to operationalize this essential ongoing relationship for the thousands of Maine children who are currently missing out on it. All children deserve to have a dental home; the many partners in this project are committed to making this aspiration a reality as we work toward our shared vision that all children in Maine can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

Who is involved in making VDH successful in Maine? What are their roles?

The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (the Network, previously known as the Partnership for Children's Oral Health) is convening and supporting a broad network of nonprofit dental clinics, dental hygienists, and local Head Start and Early Childhood Programs who are early adopters of the VDH model in Maine. The Maine VDH pilot is initially focused on serving children in Head Start programs and then extending into school and primary care settings. In each region, VDH implementation requires involvement from the following partners:

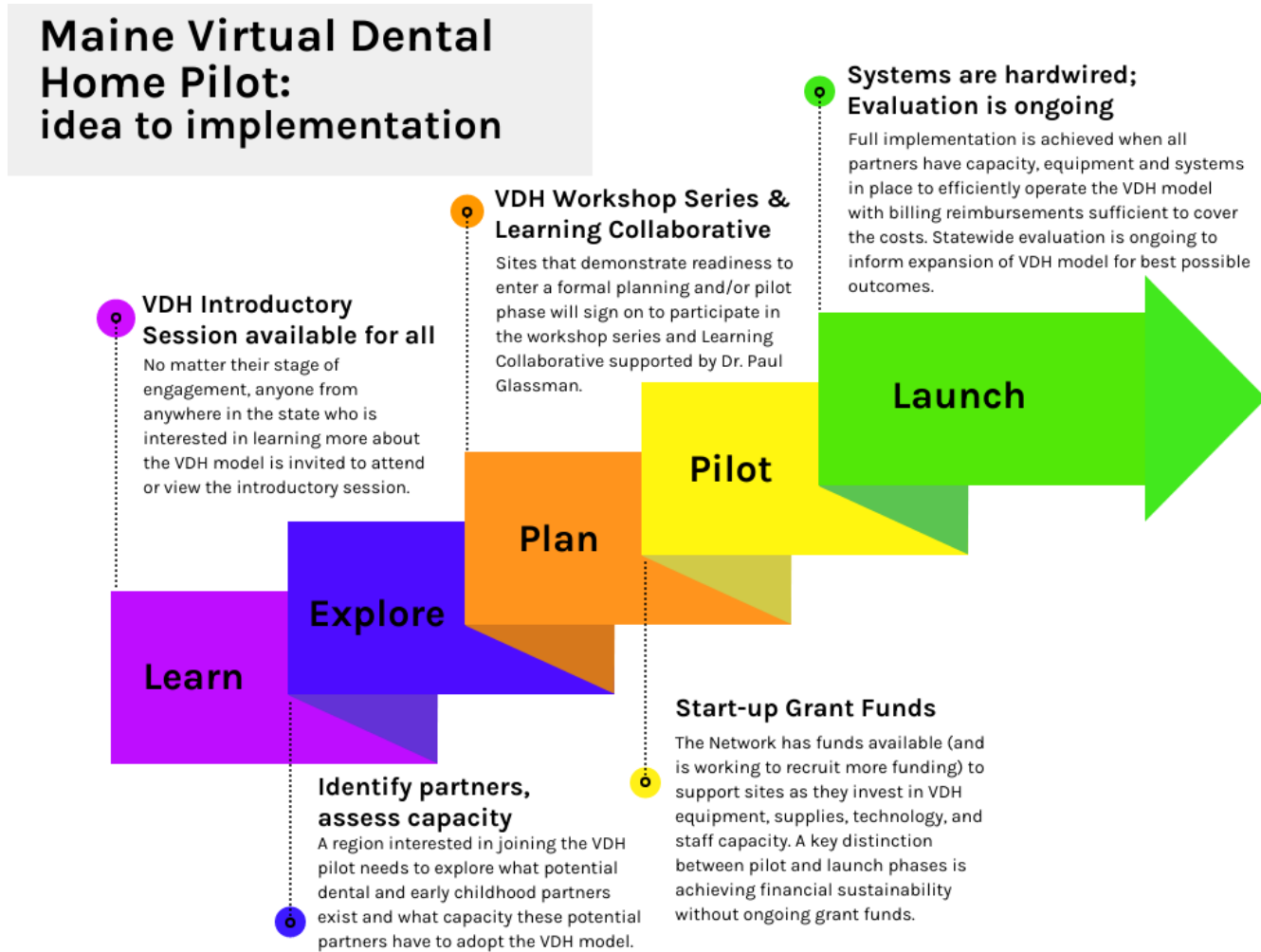
- **Head Start site:** The Maine VDH pilot will initially focus on Head Start sites as a key location to reach a large number of children who are currently underserved by Maine's oral health care system. In addition to the Head Start site administration, health staff, and educators, the Head Start Family Advocate staff plays a key role, supporting parents and coordinating care in the VDH model.
- **Dental hygienists:** The hygienist visits the Head Start program sites every 3-6 months. They complete basic preventive care, such as cleanings, education, and fluoride application, and they compile images and files to share via teledentistry technology with the dentist at the dental office. If Silver Diamine Fluoride, sealants, and temporary fillings are needed, these can also be provided on-site.
- **Dental office:** A dentist located at the dental office examines the images, documentation, and recommendations from the hygienist and creates a plan for care. If children need care beyond what can be provided by the hygienist at the Head Start location, the child is scheduled for an appointment at the dental office.
- **Children's Oral Health Network of Maine:** The Network plays a supporting role statewide, convening partners, sharing best practices, recruiting and distributing funding for start-up costs, accessing technical assistance, and advocating for change at the state level to remove obstacles to VDH success.

How can a region that is not yet part of the Maine VDH Pilot get started? How does a VDH site evolve from idea to implementation?

VDH planning starts with exploratory conversations among potential dental partners and Head Start / early childhood partners to assess readiness and capacity. If all of the partners agree to move forward, they progress to a formal planning phase to address any gaps in capacity, establish roles, identify training and technical assistance needs, and work through the local logistics. Once a plan is in place, a local pilot can begin to test the plan, train everyone on new equipment and protocols, and assess the financial sustainability of the services based on ongoing cost and reimbursement

projections. When systems are fine-tuned and all parties are comfortable with the new VDH practice, and it is clear that the services will be sustainable without grant funding, the local team can move towards institutionalization with a full VDH model naturally integrated into the early childhood setting and the dental home.

The Network plays a coordinating and supporting role statewide to help each site move towards full implementation of the VDH model. This support starts with convening potential partners, helping to assess regional capacity, and providing educational opportunities to advance through the planning and pilot phases to full launch. Further support from the Network can include start-up funds for equipment and staff time as well as technical assistance and evaluation.



**Where does this effort stand in Maine right now?
What's next?**

As of January 2022, The Network is supporting two active pilots that serve 4 counties and an additional three sites that plan to serve 5 counties and are engaged in planning to launch a pilot by August 2022. Exploratory work also aims to develop models for VDH beyond Head Start sites to include primary care and school settings.

This initial work is made possible by generous financial support from the Sadie and Harry Davis Foundation, Maine Health Access Foundation, Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation, Davis Family Foundation, Proctor and Gamble Foundation, and the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs.



Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

Do you have questions about Maine's VDH initiative?

**Contact the Network's VDH Program Coordinator,
Emilie Knight:
emilie.m.knight@gmail.com**

