

Expanding and Enhancing Dental Health Services for Older Adults

Montgomery County Commission on Aging

Summer Study Final Report – September 2016

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging convened subject matter experts at the County and State levels to discuss the current state of oral health care for older adults who reside in Montgomery County, Maryland. Members of the academic community, dentists, dental hygienists, dental health clinic program directors, the Montgomery County Government Public Health Services Dental Services Program administrator as well as commission members and other relevant providers and stakeholders participated in the summer study. The goals of the summer study were to:

1. Learn about current oral and dental health programs and services available for older adults in Montgomery County, Maryland including capacity and utilization rates as well as needs, gaps and other challenges;
2. Discuss opportunities to enhance and expand dental health services for older adults in the County with special emphasis on low-income older adult residents; and
3. Develop a plan and /or recommendations to enhance and expand services.

Current Oral and Dental Health Programs and Services Available for At-Risk Seniors in Montgomery County

The Montgomery County Government Public Health Services Dental Services Program provides dental services to populations identified as underserved, at-risk, or as having special needs. Seniors, 60 years of age and older, if eligible, can receive services at any of the six (6) County dental clinics at the following locations:

- Colesville Dental Clinic, Silver Spring, MD
- Dennis Avenue Dental Clinic, Silver Spring, MD (if other conditions exist)
- Fenton Street Dental Clinic, Silver Spring, MD
- Germantown Dental Clinic, Germantown, MD
- Metro Court Dental Clinic, Gaithersburg, MD
- Piccard Drive Dental Clinic, Rockville, MD

The eligibility requirements for the senior dental program are: 60 years of age or older, a Montgomery County resident, family income at 250% of poverty level and under or uninsured.

Currently, the County has capacity to serve 5,000 people (all age groups). The cost per visit is \$20 for a routine visit and \$30 for an emergency visit. Clients served thus far in 2016 totals 877. Clients served in 2015 totaled 916. Currently, there is a 7-10 week waiting list but the clinic can accommodate emergencies. (See Attachments for more detail.)

Additional dental clinics based in Montgomery County that provide services for seniors include the following:

- Community Clinic, Inc., Gaithersburg, MD and Wheaton, MD (not currently accepting new patients)
- Muslim Community Clinic, Silver Spring, MD
- Spanish Catholic Center, Catholic Charities, Silver Spring, MD.

Other dental resources and providers available for Montgomery County residents:

- University of Maryland Dental School, Special Care and Geriatrics Services, Baltimore, MD
- Howard University Dental School, Washington, D.C.
- Mary's Center Dental Clinic, Washington, D.C.
- Mobile Dental Programs
- Housing Opportunities Commission – New Grant from Montgomery County for Small Pilot Project

Please note: This is not an exhaustive list of resources and providers.

Oral Health Considerations and Challenges for Older Adults

- Medicare and Medicaid do not provide dental coverage.
- The majority of older adults do not have dental insurance / coverage.
- Currently there is no “standard of care” in dentistry for older adults and the American Dental Association does not recognize geriatrics as a specialty.
- Many older adults do not see the need to go to a dentist.
- Individuals should continue to see a dentist for the remainder of their lives even if no teeth are present.
- As adults age, their teeth become less sensitive to pain potentially leading to a delay in care and more advanced disease if regular exams are not provided. In addition, older adults often take medications that mask pain.
- The majority of individuals who develop mouth cancers are seniors. Mouth cancer usually has no or minimal symptoms.
- Wait time and neglect lead to oral caries creating the need for root canals.
- Many older adults opt for extractions because they cannot afford root canals.
- Many older adults, who need dentures, often cannot afford them.

- Lack of funding for root canals and dentures.
- There is a disconnect between primary care and dental care. Lack of referrals from primary care physicians.
- Many older adults cannot brush their teeth independently and / or forget to brush their teeth.
- Lack of transportation to and from dental appointments and other mobility concerns.
- Lack of appointment options.
- Nursing facilities only require one (1) oral health check per year and it is usually completed by someone other than a dentist.
- Assisted living facilities do not have any oral health care requirements.
- The State of Maryland completed a study and examined nursing homes, nutrition sites, and assisted living facilities and found high need for dental care.
- More education is needed about good oral health care and the benefits of brushing teeth.
- Difficulty recruiting dentists to work in clinics and with older adults.
- Limited number of chairs at most dental clinics (space limitations).
- The majority of other states are more progressive in funding oral health services for adults. (See Attachments for more details.)

Recommendations to Enhance & Expand Dental Health Services in Montgomery County

Summer Study Workgroup Recommendations:

Direct Services

1. Offer Dental Health Services Day(s) 1-2 times per year for seniors in Montgomery County. Data from recent dental health services days show cost is approximately \$75,000 to provide approximately \$1,000,000 in care. Need to identify a funding source(s). *Potential Partners: Catholic Charities Clinic, local dental groups and providers and county dental clinics.*
2. Examine all County dental contracts. Modify funding based on need and funding gaps. Review the contract with National Association of Counties (NACo) to see if updates are needed based on additional services offered. *Potential Partners: the mobile dentist and other contracted providers.*
3. Create a pilot program to expand and include dental providers that offer free and reduced fees to seniors. *Potential Partners: Dental schools (to identify new dentists), dental associations, dental groups and dental providers.*
4. Engage the business community. Contact companies to request donation of needed dental products and services. *Potential Partners: Maryland Dental Association.*

Prevention, Education and Public Awareness (Communication)

5. Provide quarterly oral health educational sessions at the County senior and recreational centers. Invite other senior centers located in Montgomery County to participate. Use “Silver Smiles” program as a model. *Potential Partners: the mobile dentist, Noah Dubin, home health care organizations and other providers.*
6. Enhance communication to seniors about oral health needs focusing on prevention, intervention and resources. Build a culture that embodies messages about prevention. *Potential Partners: Seniors Today, Senior Beacon, The Washington Post Health Section, County website – develop “Ask the Dentist” forum, Meals on Wheels, NACo, Geriatric Primary Care Practices, JCA, JSSA, etc.*
 - Display PSAs focused on prevention to raise awareness. *Potential Partners: Ride-On Buses, Peapod, Manna Food Bank, Home Care Agencies.*
 - Facilitate partnerships with local faith-based organizations, *Potential Partners: including hospitals that have outreach programs for example- Holy Cross Faith Community Nurse and LINCOS Programs and Adventist Health Ministry Programs.* Also, create alliances or partnerships with home health care agencies and others so messages about prevention, intervention and resources reach diverse groups.
7. Work with the Cultural Change Coalition to ensure oral health is included as an essential part of person-centered care. *Potential Partners: Cultural Change Coalition and primary care practitioners.*

Public Policy and Legislative Action

8. Provide input in development of new State Oral Health Plan. *Potential Partners: Office of Oral Health and Maryland Dental Action Coalition. Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, October 4, 2016.*
9. Support legislation to expand dental hygienists services into assisted living facilities and other senior living communities. *Potential Partners: Maryland Dental Action Coalition (HB 100 Law)*
10. Advocate for funding to be included in the State budget for Medicaid coverage of dental services for adults. *Potential Partners: Maryland Dental Action Coalition, state/ other county Commissions on Aging, Montgomery County delegation, United Seniors of Maryland, Anne Arundel Oral Health Task Force and others. (See Attachments for more details.)*

Strategic Planning

11. Examine current data collected by Montgomery County related to dental health needs/utilization/gaps and use to help inform county planning. If additional data is

needed, modify data collected. Perhaps utilize Anne Arundel County Oral Health Task Force summary as a guide. (See Attachments for more details.)

12. The Commission on Aging's Health and Wellness Committee will continue the work of the dental services summer study. *Potential Partners: Maryland Dental Action Coalition, state/ other county Commissions on Aging, Montgomery County delegation, United Seniors of Maryland, Anne Arundel Oral Health Task Force and others.*
13. Provide the Montgomery County Executive and the Montgomery County Council with a copy of the Commission on Aging's Expanding and Enhancing Dental Health Services for Older Adults in Montgomery County final report and recommendations.

Resources / Attachments

1. An Integrated Approach to Healthy Aging: Burden of Oral Disease Among Older Adults and Implications for Public Health Priorities, American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 102, No. 3, Griffin et al, March 2012.
2. Montgomery County's Public Health Dental Services, Presentation to the Commission on Aging Summer Study Workgroup, June 29, 2016.
3. Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits: An Overview, Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc., July 2016.
4. Expanding Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage: A Preliminary Cost Analysis, Presentation to the Health and Government Operations Committee, February 2, 2016.
5. Adult Dental Coverage in Maryland Medicaid, The Hilltop Institute, February 1, 2016.
6. Anne Arundel County Adult Oral Health Task Force Presentation, June 15, 2016.

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