

SAN DIEGO COUNTY ORAL HEALTH FORUM

MARCH 12, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The identification of current and anticipated oral health needs, resources and strategies that will be necessary to improve the overall health of San Diego residents were addressed at the fourth San Diego County Oral Health forum on March 12, 2010. This fourth in a series of forums since 1994 was hosted by the San Diego County Dental Health Coalition and the County of San Diego. Eighty-four invited participants represented key stakeholders: public health, academia, community based organizations, educators, and providers and consumers of medical and dental care.

The forum offered several brief informative sessions covering the etiology of common oral health problems as well as current trends in oral health education and care. The interactive discussions on oral health that followed were organized into five themes: health literacy and cultural competency, medical and dental integration, access to care, utilization and retention of dental insurance, and issues unique to adolescents. These discussions focused on existing gaps, current resources and potential solutions to be considered by both public and private health sectors.

The many potential solutions to oral health issues facing San Diego residents today echo what public health experts have illustrated in the environmental determinant model of health. Factors influencing oral health and oral health behaviors are many and include environmental, community, family, and individual level influences. Public health efforts to improve oral health must, therefore, address all levels of influence and will require multiple strategies and activities.

- *Venues accessed by our target population(s) for other resources must be considered as alternative/non-traditional service delivery points for oral health*
- *The use of mid-level practitioners must be explored*
- *Local efforts to educate the medical community about oral health and increase interaction of the medical and dental community must be improved*
- *Models using peers or community leaders as carriers of health promotion messages must be expanded*
- *The content of health messages must be appropriate for the intended audience and additional modalities of communication must be explored*
- *The public's perception of oral health and available resources must be improved through both small and large scale social marketing and media campaigns*
- *Advocacy for more affordable dental insurance premiums, grace periods for payments, improved benefit packages and patient education regarding utilization of coverage must be expanded*

Continued success and forward movement will depend on strong collaboration and the formation of new, interdisciplinary relationships. The 2010 Oral Health Forum will serve as a starting point as the Dental Health Coalition moves forward in finalizing their next three to five year strategic plan for oral health in San Diego County.

For the complete report contact The Dental Health Initiative/Share the Care, 619-692-8858