

Nevada Advisory Committee on the State Program for Oral Health (AC4OH)

August 30, 2016

Richard Whitley, Director
Department of Health and Human Services
4126 Technology Way
Carson City, NV 89706

Dear Mr. Whitley,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Advisory Committee on the State Program for Oral Health (AC4OH) to request that the Department of Health and Human Services continue funding for the State Dental Health Officer and the State Public Health Dental Hygienist positions in the SFY2018 and SFY 2019 Budget Request to the Governor. We are pleased that these important positions will be filled in SFY 2017 and we are confident that these two positions will be able to focus more attention on oral health and ultimately the overall health status of our residents.

Without these two key positions, working closely with the State's Chief Medical Officer, it will be very difficult for the State Division of Public and Behavioral Health leadership to address Core Public Health Functions and deliver the 10 Essential Public Health Services as outlined in the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) publication, *State Oral Health Infrastructure and Capacity: Reflecting on Progress and Charting the Future*.

The Executive Director of the ASTDD, which is a national non-profit funded by the CDC to assist state dental programs, has indicated that the CDC is restructuring grants in the next grant cycle to incorporate specific criteria that ensures the integration of oral health into chronic disease programs at a much higher collaborative level. If Nevada is going to be able to competitively compete for these Federal grant dollars, we need to demonstrate our willingness as a State to invest in oral health.

In 2015, the Oral Health Program was invited to submit a budget and plan for oral health promotion with the five-year federal funding opportunity proposal for the Nevada Head Start State Collaboration Office (NHSSCO). The proposal was approved by the Administration of Children and Families with direction for a budget revision to the State's application to increase the amount for oral health initiatives. Through this collaboration with NHSSCO the Oral Health Program will promote oral health education and oral disease prevention for Head Start students from 2016 – 2020. As a first step in this partnership, in 2016, NHSSCO will fund the cost of travel and supplies to do an oral health basic screening of Head Start students throughout the State. Having the State Public Health Dental Hygienist available to do the screenings will allow the Division to leverage the Head Start funding for this activity and conduct a crucial surveillance activity. The data collected in the screening is needed for future successful grant applications to access more federal funds for Nevada; to provide evidence of areas of need for

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program development and prioritization; and to provide benchmark data to measure success of implemented oral disease prevention activities for infants and young children.

The AC4OH recommended at their July 2016 meeting that the State Dental Health Officer make it a priority to evaluate viable models that might be utilized to institute a dental screening (and identification of a dental home) requirement prior to a child entering public school. This policy has been successfully implemented in other states. It would increase parent awareness of the importance of oral health for their children and the entirely preventable nature of dental caries. It would decrease the likelihood of poor oral health impacting a student's ability to participate in school. Every child deserves to have the ability to consume healthy foods, speak well, and be free of oral pain. This policy would help Nevada children be *"healthy and ready to learn"*.

In addition, structuring a strong oral health and chronic disease program that aligns with the 10 Essential Public Health and 10 Essential PH Services to Promote Oral Health will be critical in improving Nevada's grade from the PEW Charitable Trust for both oral health and chronic diseases.

In 2014, Nevada received a C-, down from a C grade for the previous reporting period in 2012, for children's dental health based on national benchmarks aimed to improve children's oral health. In particular, PEW cited the following reason for Nevada's downgrade, **"Nevada's grade in 2014, a C-, is lower than the C earned in 2012, because two of the three state Medicaid managed care organizations have closed panels, therefore hygienists are not able to bill for services delivered to all Medicaid children in schools."** (www.pewtrusts.org)

It is imperative that Nevada address oral health, including its impact on chronic disease, in order to improve the overall health status of Nevada's children and residents. We strongly urge the Department to continue funding for the State Dental Officer and State Public Health Dental Hygienist positions. These positions can make a difference in the status of oral health in Nevada.

Thank you for your past support of this important health need. We would greatly appreciate your continued support with these two positions.

Sincerely,

Christine Garvey, Chair
Advisory Committee for Oral Health

CG:ml

cc: Cody Phinney
Deborah Aquino