



ARIZONA HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Arizona Dentists Provide “Dental Homes” for Head Start Children

Oral health is very important to a child’s general health. Cavities are the most common chronic childhood disease and a critical problem among children enrolled in Head Start. Cavities are found in 1/3 of Arizona’s children by age three and over 50% over age six. Unfortunately, almost 9% of kindergarten-third grade children have urgent dental care needs! Cavities and early tooth loss can result in failure to thrive, impaired speech development, absence from and inability to concentrate in school, and reduced self-esteem.

Recently, the Office of Head Start has partnered with dental, medical, non-profit, and state organizations in Arizona to ensure every child in our state has access to immediate and long term dental care. This “Dental Home” initiative links children in Head Start programs to local dentists who will ensure that each child’s oral health care is delivered in a comprehensive, ongoing, accessible, coordinated and family-centered way by their dentist.

This partnership of oral health care professionals and physicians including their respective professional societies, state and local Head Start groups, non-profit organizations, and educators will provide the following:

- Project leadership, administration and organizational support;
- Offer oral health expertise and technical assistance;
- Develop networks of dentists to provide access to dental homes;
- Train dentists to enhance their capability to meet the oral health needs of young children and their understanding of HS/EHS programs; and
- Enhance HS/EHS oral health staff training and parent education programs.

Many of the children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start programs are faced with barriers to oral health care, including financial challenges, lack of insurance coverage or distance from a dental facility. Local networks that engage local dentists and HS personnel as well as other community leaders are being developed to identify strategies to overcome barriers to accessing dental homes for Head Start children.