Head Start National Center on Health Oral Health Project:

A Resource for Children’s Oral Health Advocates

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and its partners are in year 2 of a cooperative agreement with the Office of Head Start (OHS) to operate the National Center on Health (NCH), one of six national resource centers funded by OHS. The oral health component of NCH, known as the oral health project (OHP), is being led jointly by the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center (OHRC) and the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD). The centers and focus areas are shown in Figure 1.

NCH goals are to:

1. Provide evidence- and practice-based information and materials to the Head Start community
2. Work collaboratively with leaders in the health, early childhood and child care fields to improve the health of Early Head Start (EHS)/Head Start (HS) children and their families
3. Work with national, state, and local organizations and agencies to enhance the health care infrastructure that impacts and serves EHS/HS children and families

Guiding Principles

- Promote evidence-informed, practice-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive messages, materials, and services to help Head Start staff meet the program performance standards specific to oral health.
• Focus on prevention and early intervention.
• Preserve what works while promoting innovation.
• Leverage public/private partnerships.
• Communicate and coordinate with health professionals (e.g., dentists, dental hygienists, physicians, nurse practitioners, nutritionists), child care professionals, and representatives from government agencies, organizations, and programs.

Framework
The framework for NCH oral health activities includes 1) disease prevention and management, 2) access to care, and 3) systems integration. NCH aims to promote advances in the way that oral health is perceived and how oral health knowledge is acted upon as well as in the way that oral health education and preventive and treatment services are delivered. The Office of Head Start continues to place special emphasis on the needs of American Indian/Alaska Native families, Migrant/Seasonal Farmworker families, and families with Children with Special Health Care Needs. There will be increased emphasis on the oral health needs of pregnant women and young children in Early Head Start.

Activities
OHS is no longer providing funding for state leads/regional coordinators or projects that were begun under previous Dental Home Initiatives. The Oral Health Project, therefore, will

• Build on successful models/practices at the state and local level and highlight them via broad dissemination
• Work with national organizations and federal agencies to promote improvements in dental care delivery, financing and oral health data collection/tracking to improve access to preventive services and dental care
• Promote collaboration of national organizations to maintain current state and local communication networks and create new ones
• Work with partners to promote and provide training/increase skills of dental/medical office teams; EHS/HS health and technical assistant specialists and program staff; and EHS/HS families
• Promote medical/dental collaboration and use of community support systems
• Provide consistent messaging on oral health for EHS/HS families and staff and health care teams

How Children’s Oral Health Advocates Can Work with Head Start’s National Center on Health
Contact: nchinfo@aap.org

• Add NCH to your mailing list and share your materials
• Subscribe to the NCH monthly newsletter, Brush Up on Oral Health
• Reach out to Head Start/Early Head Start Centers in your community