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Assessing the Oral Health Needs of Public Housing Residents

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: "Tooth Smart Healthy Start," is a randomized clinical trial which aims to reduce the incidence of early childhood caries (ECC) in Boston public housing residents as part of the NIH-funded Northeast Center for Research to Evaluate and Eliminate Dental Disparities. The purpose of this project was to assess public housing stakeholders’ perception of the oral health needs of public housing residents and their interest in replicating "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" in other public housing sites across the nation.

Methods: The target population was the 180 attendees of the 2010 meeting of the Health Care for Residents of Public Housing National Conference. A ten question survey which assessed conference attendees’ beliefs about oral health and its importance to public housing residents was distributed. Data was analyzed using SAS 9.1. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable and results were stratified by participants’ roles.

Results: Thirty percent of conference attendees completed the survey. The participants consisted of residents, agency representatives, and housing authority personnel. When asked to rank health issues facing public housing residents, oral health was rated as most important (42%) or top three (16%) by residents. The agency representatives and housing authority personnel rated oral health among the top three (33% and 58% respectively) and top five (36% and 25% respectively). When participants ranked the three greatest resident health needs out of eight choices, oral health was the most common response. Majority of the participants expressed interest in replicating the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" program at their sites.

Conclusion: All stakeholder groups identified oral health as one of the greatest health needs of residents in public housing. Furthermore, if shown to reduce ECC, there is potential to improve the oral health of millions of U.S. residents. The purpose of the project was to assess public housing stakeholders’ perception of the oral health needs of public housing residents as well as their interest in replicating the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" program in other public housing sites across the nation.

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INTRODUCTION

Dental caries is a chronic infectious disease and the most prevalent unmet health care need in US children. Despite tremendous advances in population based interventions to prevent dental caries, such as dental sealants, community water fluoridation and fluoridated toothpaste, the prevalence of Early Childhood Caries (ECC) in children is increasing and disproportionately affecting children from racial and ethnic minority groups. Given the chronic nature of dental caries, clinically-based preventive and restorative care will be inadequate to decrease disparities in ECC prevalence. We hypothesize that a multimodal community-based approach, known as the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" program which incorporates peer delivered motivational interviewing with oral health assessments and fluoride varnish application, will be more effective than assessments, education and fluoride alone. If successful, this intervention has the potential to improve the oral health of millions of U.S. residents. The purpose of the project was to assess public housing stakeholders’ perception of the oral health needs of public housing residents as well as their interest in replicating the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" program in other public housing sites across the nation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that all stakeholder groups identified oral health as one of the greatest health needs of public housing residents. Furthermore, if shown to reduce ECC, there is significant interest in implementing the Tooth Smart Healthy Start Program amongst conference attendees which are generally representative of key public housing stakeholders across the nation.

METHODS

The target population was the 180 attendees of the 2010 meeting of the Health Care for Public Housing National Training Conference. The conference provides training and technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of federally-funded health centers in order to increase access to health care, eliminate health disparities, and enhance health care delivery for the 8.7 million residents of public and assisted housing.

A 10 question survey which assessed conference attendees’ beliefs about oral health and its importance to public housing residents was distributed during conference workshops. Data was inputted into excel and analyzed using SAS 9.1. Coding, double data entry, and data cleaning were performed prior to analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable and results were stratified by participants’ roles.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Most Important</th>
<th>Top Three</th>
<th>Top Five</th>
<th>Top Ten</th>
<th>Below Ten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident (n=60)</td>
<td>58% (14)</td>
<td>21% (4)</td>
<td>21% (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Representative (n=7)</td>
<td>42% (8)</td>
<td>16% (3)</td>
<td>43% (2)</td>
<td>57% (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Authority (n=24)</td>
<td>13% (3)</td>
<td>58% (14)</td>
<td>25% (6)</td>
<td>4% (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n=8)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38% (3)</td>
<td>38% (3)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interest in Replicating the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident (n=17)</td>
<td>76% (13)</td>
<td>24% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Representative (n=4)</td>
<td>100% (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Authority (n=20)</td>
<td>85% (17)</td>
<td>15% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (n=6)</td>
<td>83% (5)</td>
<td>17% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Future Steps

- Complete clinical trial and analyze results.
- Disseminate results in both dental meetings and non traditional settings, such as the public housing conference.
- Replicate in other settings, if successful.

The Partners

- Boston Housing Authority
- Partners in Health and Housing-Prevention Research Center (CDC U48 DP00058) / RHA Program
- Community Committee for Health Promotion
- Boston University Goldman School of Dental Medicine (GSDM)
- Center for Research to Evaluate and Eliminate Dental Disparities

The Partners have partnered with the following organizations to assess the oral health needs of public housing residents and their interest in replicating the "Tooth Smart Healthy Start" program in other public housing sites across the nation.