

# ADAPT – ORAL HEALTH FOR OLDER ADULTS

The Fenwick Foundation

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*ADAPT* (Addult Dental Access, Prevention and Treatment) is an initiative focused on providing access to dental care and treatment to older adults – those living in nursing homes and other long-term care residences and those “aging in place” and living at home. Too many of older adults cannot afford and/or are unable to access this essential health care need. Oral care literacy is insufficient as well – understanding ways to take care of our teeth and gums is a challenge for older adults as it is for so many of us. *ADAPT* is focused on closing these treatment and literacy gaps and encouraging preventive care practices and good oral hygiene.

## About Our Initiative

The Fenwick Foundation (Fenwick), a 501(c)(3) public charity, began its oral care and treatment efforts with a pilot project in Northern Virginia designed to test different ways of providing care and treatment for this population. We coordinated with local dental practices, long-term care facility staff, nonprofit partners and governmental agencies to work through the financial and logistical “red tape” impediments to care. We learned that while the financial costs of care are the biggest challenge, the logistical challenges are a “close second” and too often result in no dental care treatment at all. We set out to change this condition.

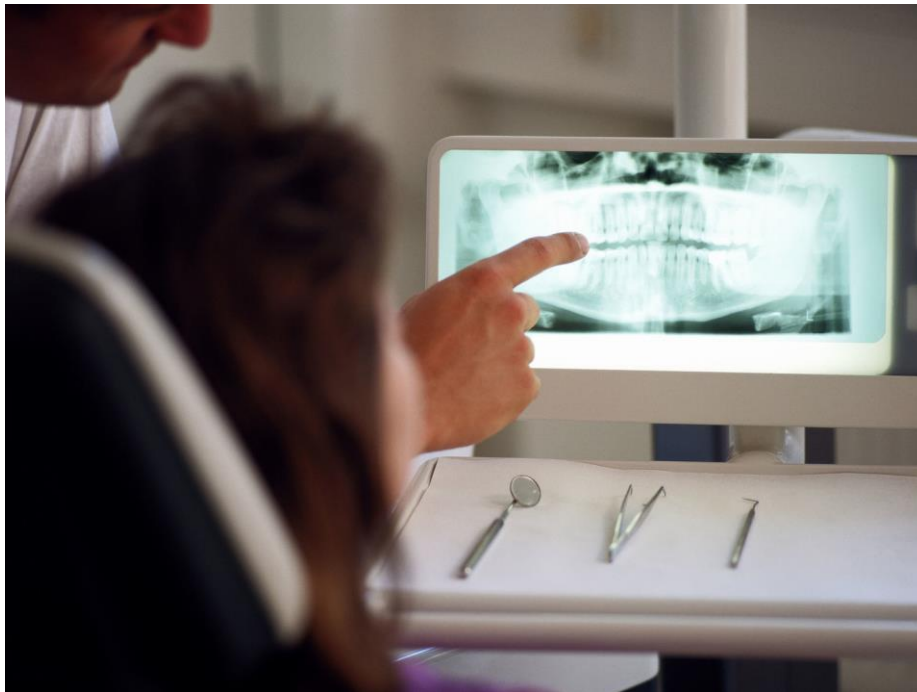
- ✓ ***ADAPT* is focused on overcoming financial and logistical impediments, ensuring that patients have access to care and then actually receive care – comprehensive care. We work to identify sources of income to pay for dental care. We also work to identify best approaches for care – dental office visits, on-site treatment at long-term care facilities, oral hygiene education and follow up.**

It is clear that new ways and methods are needed to garner dental care resources for the older adult population. As such, we believe that our initiative is innovative – adapting and adjusting to the challenges older adults face to keep themselves healthy. *ADAPT* emphasizes coordination, collaboration and employment of **system change** as needed.

- ✓ ***ADAPT* is sustainable in that it identifies available payment sources – grants/donations, Medicaid and related reimbursement, and/or family pay. It employs creative approaches to make it easier to treat older adults – by identifying the best ways to access and receive dental care. For example, nursing home patients are scheduled in groups for on-site facility checkups, cleaning, and treatment.**
- ✓ ***ADAPT* is not only a program but also a model for how to provide older adults access to dental care – and, even more importantly, to make sure they receive it. We have been working with local partners – dental practices, government agencies, nonprofits and long-term care management and staff – to ensure identification of patients, determination of patient payment options, scheduling, treatment and follow up, and providing education and training for promoting good oral hygiene.**
- ✓ ***ADAPT* is designed to address what we consider to be a major “below the radar” need. Our overriding goal is to make oral care possible for many who otherwise can’t get access to it. We’re determined to make this effort work.**

## Need and Background

For too many low-income older adults, the lack of any basic dental care is staggering. Many older adults receive dental care and resources do exist. However, large numbers of low income and “80 plus” older adults do not receive **any** significant dental care and suffer from general poor dental health, as well as a full range of dental maladies including periodontal disease, dental caries (tooth decay) and abscess. Good oral care and regular access to dentists are essential to overall health and well-being. A decline in oral health – such as gum disease, missing teeth, and dental cavities – can affect nutritional status, behavior, self-esteem and overall quality of life for older people, as referenced by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Research has uncovered possible links between gum or periodontal disease and diabetes, heart disease and stroke.



Even where care can be afforded, the logistics of providing treatment quite often renders care unattainable. This is most evident with long-term care residents but also among the older adult population living at home – many decline care at a dental office because the logistics of physically transporting them from the long-term care facility to the dentist, and other in-office impediments, are arduous and overwhelming.

There is ample data and analysis of this need at the federal, state and local levels that qualifies and quantifies the problem. In one Northern Virginia county, a 2014 survey of the

County's long-term care residence centers demonstrated that only a little more than ten percent (10%) of nursing home and long-term care residents had received any dental care. Further, in many states Medicaid does not generally cover dental care for adults except for emergency medical treatment. The vast majority of Medicaid nursing home residents receive no routine or non-emergency care. Likewise, Medicare does not cover most oral care treatment and services.



**The Fenwick Foundation Pilot.** We set out to tackle this problem. We conducted a program where we tested different approaches to treatment (to “kick the tires”/assess feasibility) and identified an array of providers and treatment options – focusing on attracting local dentists, clinics, dental schools and government partners, to provide sustainable services for the target population. The results of our pilot indicated that:

- **Virtually all patients receiving dental care required additional follow up treatment as documented in treatment plans;**
- **In-facility dentistry emerged as an essential and logical treatment approach, particularly given that so many patients are physically and otherwise challenged;**
- **In long-term care facilities, “in-facility” care helps to bend the cost curve by providing services on-site and for defined blocks of time where multiple patients are seen and treated;**
- **Addressing the necessary logistics of care are essential for this target population.**

## How ADAPT Addresses the Need

The *ADAPT* initiative builds off our pilot results. *ADAPT* addresses the challenges and logistics of providing oral care by:

- ✓ **Increasing patient capacity** – Fenwick’s initiative provides oral care to individuals who currently do not receive any or adequate care.
- ✓ **Expanding the scope of services provided** – Fenwick’s in-facility efforts bring oral care to those for whom the logistics of dental office treatment are difficult and challenging.
- ✓ **Developing system change and enhancing coordinated systems of care** – Fenwick’s initiative is designed to link other community resources and to facilitate these linkages. Our initiative includes new protocols for coordination with long-term care facility management and staff, oral care professionals and other community resources.

## Community Engagement and Collaboration

We planned and executed our pilot with input and recommendations from government officials, nonprofit partners, long-term care management/staff and advocates. We will continue these efforts as we implement our broader initiative. Our resource efforts have been focused on grants, utilization of government, insurance and private reimbursement options and collaboration with partners to create “pop-up” dental clinics for in-facility treatment of long-term care residents and “in-home” treatment for those aging in place.

## Changing No to Yes!

Lastly, our initiative and focus have helped to change thinking about the efficacy of oral care for this target population of older adults. This underlying shifting of “can’t do” to “can do” is a fundamental and so important for the success of this initiative.

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**About The Fenwick Foundation.** The Fenwick Foundation is a 501(c)(3) public charity focused on improving quality of life, health and wellbeing in ways that are not addressed or “below the radar.” We serve older adults, Veterans, people with disabilities and caregivers in the Washington, DC Metro area including the outer Northern Virginia counties, Baltimore Metro area and several other locations along the East Coast.

Visit us at our web site: [www.thefenwickfoundation.org](http://www.thefenwickfoundation.org).