

The Fenwick Foundation

Project ADAPT - Oral Care for Low-Resource and Vulnerable Older Adults

Project ADAPT (Addult Dental Access, Prevention and Treatment) is an initiative focused on providing access to dental care and treatment to low-resource and vulnerable older adults – those living in nursing homes and other long-term care residences, and at home in their communities. Far too many cannot afford and/or are unable to access this essential health need.



A Northern Virginia patient receiving in-facility dental treatment by a Fenwick dentist

The Need

Too many low-resource and vulnerable older adults do not receive **any** significant dental care and suffer from general poor dental health, including a full range of dental maladies including periodontal disease, dental caries (tooth decay) and abscess. Good oral care is essential to overall health and well-being.

Even where care can be afforded, the logistics impediments quite often renders care unattainable. Many can't get to a dental office because the logistics of physically transporting them to a dental office and other in-office impediments, are arduous and overwhelming.

There is ample data and analysis of the need at the federal, state and local levels. In one Northern Virginia county, a survey of long-term care residence centers demonstrated that only a little more than ten percent (10%) of residents had received any dental care. In Virginia, very limited Medicaid benefits exist for dental care. Medicare does not have a dental care benefit.

About Our Initiative

The Fenwick Foundation, 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.

- ✓ ***Project ADAPT is focused on overcoming financial and logistical impediments, ensuring that patients have access to care and 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, facility-based and at home treatment, 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. *Project ADAPT* emphasizes coordination, collaboration and employment of **system change** as needed.

- ✓ ***Project ADAPT is sustainable in that it utilizes available payment sources – grants and donations, insurance reimbursement, and/or family pay. It employs creative approaches to make it easier to provide treatment. For example, nursing home patients are scheduled in groups for facility-based checkups, cleaning, and treatment.***
- ✓ ***Project ADAPT is not only a program but also a model for how to provide older adults access to dental care – and to make sure they receive it. We work with partners – dental practices, government agencies, nonprofits and long-term care management/staff – to identify/define patients needing care, payment options, scheduling, treatment/follow up, and to provide education/training to promote oral hygiene.***
- ✓ ***Project 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.***

Community Engagement and Collaboration

We planned and executed our initiative 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

Changing No to Yes!

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

Learn More About The Fenwick Foundation: www.thefenwickfoundation.org.