

Rural Health Clinic Dental Integration Project

What is the Rural Health Clinic Dental Integration Project?

Lack of access to oral health care is a serious issue for rural residents in our state and can affect their ability to speak, smile, eat, their self-esteem, management of chronic disease, and attendance at work and school. Our goal in Washington State is to address gaps in oral health services for residents through supporting Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) who wish to incorporate dental service lines into their practices. In 2018, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved Washington's RHCs to receive an encounter rate for Washington Apple Health-covered dental services. Based on this new and innovative payment model, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) was awarded two four-year, 1.6 million dollar Oral Health Workforce Activities grants from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). We are currently in the second 4-year cycle of funding. The goal of this funding is to improve access to high-quality, integrated oral healthcare for vulnerable rural populations by increasing the number of dental clinics providing care to Medicaid clients in rural dental HPSAs.¹

Current Partners

Dr. Donald Chi at the University of Washington School of Dentistry is leading the project evaluation efforts. Evaluation activities include ongoing process evaluation for continuous quality improvement; as well as outcome evaluation related to the impact of integrated dental care on the communities served through this project.

Jefferson Healthcare (JH) in Port Townsend is serving as the initial pilot model for this project. JHC opened a 6-chair dental clinic within their rural health clinic and began seeing patients in June of 2019. Less than two years into their grant project, JHC succeeded in their goal to add integrated dental services. Challenges with electronic health record system integration and billing have been resolved. The JH model and their lessons learned serve as a foundational resource for other RHCs who wish to integrate dental care.

How can RHCs participate?

DOH invites 3-6 RHCs to join this project and establish dental service lines over the next three project funding years (Sept 1, 2023 – August 31, 2024; and Sept 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025, and Sept 1, 2025—August 31, 2026). Establishing a dental service line of care within an RHC system is an opportunity to reach rural residents who have been disproportionately impacted by dental disease due to lack of access to services. RHCs can design a dental service line that works for their community; whether that be through the use of mobile equipment, on-site teledentistry solutions, or by adding multiple dental chairs to their facility; or other creative solutions.

For RHCs that currently provide dental services, we can offer expansion support to increase their dental service areas.

Eligible entities are CMS certified Rural Health Clinics located within dental HPSAs in Washington State.

¹ Project title: *Washington's novel approach: Improving access to integrated oral health care for Medicaid populations living in rural dental HPSAs*. HRSA Grant # T12HP31867

The sub-awarded RHCs will:

- Develop and implement dental service lines tailored to work with their facility and in their community.
- Be able to provide a non-federal match amount of a minimum of 40% of the award.²
- Participate in evaluation activities led by UW research team. For example:
 - Participate in annual qualitative interviews about the unmet dental needs in their community and expectations and anticipated impact of adding dental services to their RHC.
 - Provide monthly data regarding patient volume, payer mix, and referrals to dental care from primary care.
- Participate in check-ins with DOH project staff quarterly or as needed.
- DOH will seek to integrate sub-awarded RHC models, their challenges, obstacles and solutions as part of an educational resource (toolkit) to be disseminated across the state and nationally

What support will RHC's receive?

The current project team of DOH, JH and UW offer the following:

- DOH and JH will provide technical assistance to RHCs with planning, policy development, staffing plans, workflow, integration, and building dental community relationships.
- Recruitment assistance from DOH workforce staff to fill oral health positions in the RHC.
- UW evaluation team will create and implement a mini-evaluation plan customized and specific to the circumstance of each sub-awarded RHC.
- Evaluation team will use claims data from RHCs and Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) to measure increases in access to oral health services.

What funding is available?

The total amount of funds available per year is approximately \$140,000. The range of funding per RHC for the initial project period (09/01/2023- 08/31/2024) is a minimum of \$90,000 and maximum of \$140,000 (approximate), which may be renewable one time, for a total of two years, depending on available funds. Funding may not be used for capital expenses, such as the purchase of, or improvements to, a building or land.

Awards are contingent upon the availability of appropriated state or federal funds distributed to DOH. In the event funds are reduced, withdrawn, or limited in any way, the contract may either be terminated immediately by DOH's discretion or renegotiated within the constraints of the new funding limitations and conditions.

What is the application process?

1. **Letters of interest are due by Tues, April 25, 2023, by 5:00 pm.** This letter may be very simple and should identify the contact person or persons for the RHC. **All future communication about this opportunity will be routed to the person(s) named. You may name one or more contacts.**

² Match amount does not have to be an additional amount in cash or "real dollars." Match amounts can be met by "in-kind," or any non-federal funding that is already obligated for project expenses, and can include capital expenses such as building improvements.

2. All RHCs who submit a Letter of Interest by the due date will receive further communication with instructions for the brief proposal process.
3. If the demand is higher than the number of slots, proposals will be scored by the DOH RHC Dental Clinic review committee, and the scoring criteria will be transparent.
4. When the awarded RHCs are identified, the contract process will begin and assistance will be offered in the planning and development of the RHC's dental service line.

Please send Letters of Interest to Sahla Suman and Mandy Latchaw at the email addresses below by no later than 5:00 pm on Tuesday April 25, 2023.

Sahla Suman, Rural Oral Health Consultant, Washington State Department of Health
Sahla.Suman@doh.wa.gov . Please also 'cc Mandy Latchaw, State Office of Rural Health Program Manager & RHC Consultant at Mandy.Latchaw@doh.wa.gov

Timeline

