



CIRCLE OF SMILES PROGRAM

South Dakota American Indians experience some of the worst oral health disparities in the country. Through the Circle of Smiles: Improving Oral Health in Indian Country project, Delta Dental of South Dakota will partner with the Aberdeen Area Indian Health Service, the South Dakota Dental Association, and the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board to improve the oral health status of American Indians living on South Dakota's nine Indian reservations.

The program will focus on reducing oral health disparities by expanding the preventive oral health workforce in two areas: dental hygienists and community health workers. Delta Dental will hire seven dental hygienists to work in reservation communities. Also, American Indian Tribes will be hiring fifteen community health workers called Oral Health Coordinators. Both workforces will be deployed in community settings on and near reservations to improve access to dental prevention services, oral health education and care coordination.

The target population includes pregnant women, mothers of young children, children under age 9 and persons with diabetes living on South Dakota Indian Reservations. The program will demonstrate how improved access to preventive oral health services will reduce costs and untreated dental disease which has long term consequences. In addition, the program will demonstrate how dental extenders will help address workforce issues, including the shortage of dentists across Indian Health Service and in many communities across the nation.

The Circle of Smiles program has two overarching aims:

- 1) Improve the care and oral health of American Indian children under age 9 and their mothers on South Dakota reservations; and,
- 2) Improve the care and oral health of American Indian people with diabetes on South Dakota reservations.

The youth and mothers will be reached in community and school settings, while the people with diabetes will be primarily served in IHS clinics. Program goals include:

- 1) Increasing the number of infants having a preventive dental visit before their first birthday from the eight percent baseline to 25 percent;
- 2) Reducing the number of children under age 9 who need surgery center care for early childhood caries by 30 percent from the year one baseline;
- 3) Increasing the rate of children ages 6-9 who have a dental sealant on a permanent molar from the 46 percent baseline to 75 percent; and,
- 4) Increasing the number of people with diabetes who have an annual dental cleaning from 27.4 percent to 66 percent.

Delta Dental of South Dakota anticipates sustaining this effort long term by maintaining the dental hygiene workforce on the reservations through IHS/Medicaid/private insurance reimbursement. Additionally, we will be working with interested tribal organizations and the Department of Social Services to assist them in maintaining the dental community health workers through potential Medicaid reimbursement. While both of these interventions may be ongoing costs to the Medicaid program, we believe they will more than pay for themselves by preventing disease in the long term.