

ORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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This presentation will be recorded



- ▶ The Missouri Coalition for Oral Health is a non-profit advocacy agency
- ▶ Revised in 2019 –
 - ▶ Mission - To improve oral health with all Missourians by advocating for sound public policy
 - ▶ Vision – Oral Health for all Missourians
- ▶ The Coalition is best described as a statewide network of advocates working to improve Missouri's oral health through system change

POLICY GOALS

- ▶ Reduction of tobacco use and vaping to improve Missouri oral health
- ▶ Incorporation of oral health care in school-based health care
- ▶ Expanded coverage of and access to silver diamine fluoride for all Missourians
- ▶ Improvement of MO HealthNet by implementing best practices and system improvements to increase provider participation and MO HealthNet participant usage
- ▶ Inclusion of a comprehensive dental benefit in MO HealthNet
- ▶ Protection and expansion of public water system fluoridation
- ▶ Expansion of access to dental sealants for children without routine dental care
- ▶ Inclusion of a comprehensive dental benefit in Medicare
- ▶ Implementation of a statewide public awareness campaign about the importance of oral health to overall health
- ▶ Strengthening provider networks and expansion of service delivery of dental care for high-risk, vulnerable, MO HealthNet and uninsured populations, including people with disabilities and special health care needs
- ▶ Incorporation of oral health in the patient-centered medical home

ADVOCACY

- ▶ At a basic level advocacy is simply raising awareness about an issue that is important to you.
- ▶ Contacts with state and federal legislators, city council members, county commission members, elected and appointed government members show that oral health is important to you and to Missourians.
- ▶ Advocacy can also be about specifically requesting an action, such as passing a law, funding a project or program, or changing a regulation.
- ▶ Decision-makers need to know that oral health is important to Missourians and important to you .
- ▶ Without your voice it is easy for decision-makers to forget about oral health.

PREPARE

- ▶ Before making contact with a decision-maker, do some background research
 - ▶ You can find a great deal of information online
 - ▶ Most important information to find: the interest of the decision-maker
 - ▶ This will help you understand their priorities
- ▶ Look up your Senator and Representative ahead of time
 - ▶ Committee assignments
 - ▶ Legislation
 - ▶ Bio
 - ▶ Photo
 - ▶ Address & Room Number
 - ▶ Phone Number

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

- ▶ Most decision-makers understand that they are working in a government position – elected or otherwise – to serve the public interest, and like to hear from constituents
- ▶ Legislators like to hear from constituents and concerned citizens
- ▶ They will listen to you
- ▶ Think of your contact in terms of longevity
- ▶ Making a connection now can help later
- ▶ Your voice as an individual citizen can carry more weight than lobbyists or professional advocacy staff

TALKING WITH LEGISLATORS

- ▶ Because of pandemic concerns we are not asking MCOH members to meet in person
- ▶ We recommend talking via phone or writing a letter
- ▶ To achieve a phone conversation, you will need to contact the office and request an appt.
- ▶ Introduce yourself and say you are with the Missouri Coalition for Oral Health
- ▶ Refer to legislators as Senator x or Representative x
- ▶ Legislators expect to be asked to do something
- ▶ Even with a phone conversation, you should expect interruptions
- ▶ Legislators often have many issues in mind – they may talk with you about something that is important to them
 - ▶ If you wish to engage with them on issues not related to the Coalition, try to make it clear that you are speaking as an individual at that point
 - ▶ Your conversation on an unrelated issue may have an impact on the conversation about oral health

TALKING WITH LEGISLATORS

- ▶ If you cannot talk with the legislator, talking with the LA (Legislative Assistant) or other staff and interns can be just as beneficial
 - ▶ Never refer to an LA as a secretary
- ▶ Staff members can make sure your issue is raised and remembered
- ▶ If you get a question you cannot answer that is fine – note on the Feedback survey
- ▶ Making a connection on a personal level is good
- ▶ Always be polite and thank them for their time

WRITING LEGISLATORS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

- ▶ Most communication now happens by email
- ▶ MCOH recommends writing a letter to your legislators
- ▶ Letters are somewhat unusual and more likely to make an impression
 - ▶ A hand-written note is likely to stand out, but ensure it is legible
- ▶ Be clear and to the point
- ▶ Introduce yourself
- ▶ If you get a response, please drop us a note at info@oralhealthmissouri.org, particularly if there is follow-up that needs to happen
- ▶ Be polite
- ▶ You may include a copy of the 2021 Legislative priorities

A NOTE ABOUT ADDRESSING THE ENVELOPE

The Honorable *Senator's First and Last Names*

The State Senate Rm. *Room Number*

Jefferson City, MO 65101

The Honorable *Representative's First and Last Names*

Missouri House of Representatives Rm. *Room Number*

Jefferson City MO 65101

- ▶ You can find addresses on the House and Senate websites
- ▶ If you have questions or need assistance, drop us a line at info@oralhealthmissouri.org

2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- ▶ Support HB819 (Rep. Wallingford) - Legislation to Support Local Public Water Fluoridation Decisions
 - ▶ HB819 was filed by Representative Wayne Wallingford to ensure that local people benefit from the input of their county health department in considering public water fluoridation
 - ▶ This legislation will ensure that community members and decision-makers are fully informed with accurate information from local people working to support community health
 - ▶ The county health department is the only local agency charged with assuring community health
(Similar to SB619 in 2020 session and to SB278 & HB975 in 2019 session)
- ▶ Continue to Fund Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits and expand to include comprehensive benefits
 - ▶ Thanks to the Missouri Legislature for ongoing support of a limited Medicaid adult dental benefit, including preventive care
 - ▶ Reinstatement of adult dental benefits has resulted in a nearly 50% drop in use of hospital emergency departments for non-traumatic dental
 - ▶ Increasing benefits to a comprehensive level will help ensure that the ongoing oral health of Medicaid eligible adults is supported
- ▶ Increase Access to Dental Care
 - ▶ Medicaid dental provider rates are low in Missouri. As a result, many private dentists do not participate in Medicaid. While federally qualified health centers provide services to many Missourians, an increase in provider rates will ensure that more private dentists provide services to those eligible for Medicaid. Increase access to dental care by increasing Medicaid provider rates

ACTION STEPS

- ▶ In the next 2 weeks compose and send a letter to your Missouri Senator and your Missouri representative or hold a phone conversation with each
- ▶ Complete the survey to record your action and provide any additional information or feedback

DISCUSSION GROUP QUESTIONS

- ▶ We will now break into to small discussion groups
- ▶ This is to give you the opportunity to share your experience, thoughts, anxieties and questions in a setting more conducive to learning a new skill
- ▶ Please note –
 - ▶ Your voice can make more of a difference than you have imagined
 - ▶ Working together, the sky is the limit
 - ▶ There are no bad questions
 - ▶ Anxiety about something new is par for the course
 - ▶ Some attendees have a lot of experience, some have none
- ▶ Each groups should consider the following questions –
 - ▶ What successes and challenges have you had in previous legislative visits?
 - ▶ What concerns do you have in regards to talking with elected officials?
 - ▶ How can MCOH better assist you in your advocacy outreach efforts?
- ▶ We will re-convene as a large groups near the end of this session

PLEASE SEND QUESTIONS TO
INFO@ORALHEALTHMISSOURI.ORG

THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO FOR MISSOURI ORAL HEALTH!

