



## Children's Oral Health Toolkit: Case Study #1, Legislative Brief

*This document is a brief for state legislators, urging them to support a bill to increase access to oral health care by expanding the services provided by registered dental hygienists. This case study looks at the document before and after implementing reframing recommendations, and illustrates the importance of including values and a solutions-oriented approach to make a stronger argument.*

### **BEFORE:**

#### **FACTS**

- The Florida Surgeon General emphasizes the importance of oral health care to overall general health.
- People with disabilities have more dental disease, more missing teeth, and more difficulty receiving dental care than other members of the general population.
- From July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007, one hundred ninety six (196) Medicaid recipients under the age of six were admitted to Florida hospitals for life-threatening dental infections.
- Nationally, children miss more than 51 million school hours each year due to dental disease.
- The oral health care needs of the elderly residing in nursing homes are not being adequately met.

### **AFTER REFRAMING:**

#### **ORAL HEALTH MATTERS**

Innovative states have been able to design programs that connect communities with the preventive oral health care needed to stay healthy. These programs have solved problems of oral health access and shown significant long-term improvements for children and adults. The Florida Surgeon General emphasizes the importance of oral health care to overall general health.

*Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease; fortunately it is almost entirely preventable. Nationally, children miss more than 51*

million school hours each year due to dental disease. These children can have trouble eating, speaking and paying attention in school. Tooth decay is five times more common than asthma. Poor oral health has been associated with heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and delivery of pre-term and low-birth-weight babies.

Left untreated, dental disease can even result in death, as was seen in 2007, when a 12-year-old boy from Maryland died from a bacterial brain infection that began with an abscessed tooth. Children in Florida are at the same risk, but we know how to treat this disease. The combination of sealants and fluoride has the potential to nearly eliminate tooth decay in school-age children.

Floridians cannot be healthy without good oral health!

### **Analysis:**

Beginning with a disconnected series of facts offers a lot of information, but it doesn't help the reader understand why these facts are important. In the revised text, beginning with values of Ingenuity and Prevention signals why this issue matters, and underscores the fact that we can do something about it.

### **BEFORE:**

#### **WHY SUPPORT**

Dental decay is the most common chronic childhood disease; fortunately *it is almost entirely preventable.*

Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH):

- Prevention specialist
- Formally educated
- Licensed professional
- Underutilized in Florida

An RDH can safely and economically provide direct access to preventive oral health services, supported by a national track record.

#### **THE LEGISLATION**

- Gives RDHs authority in health access settings to provide cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants without the physical presence, prior authorization or examination by a dentist.
- School-based prevention programs and dental hygiene programs added to the definition of health access settings.
- Includes definition of school-based prevention program.

- Adds health access settings to places where an RDH can perform dental charting.

## **AFTER REFRAMING:**

### **FLORIDA CAN DO BETTER**

According to a report released 2/23/10 by the Pew Center on the States, Florida receives an "F" on how well we're employing proven and promising approaches to ensure the oral health of our children. When policy makers, school nurses, pediatricians, business leaders and other community members work together with dental professionals to make oral health a statewide priority, all persons in Florida gain access to much-needed services.

What can our state do now?

### **SUPPORT SB 490 and HB 1469**

- Authorize RDHs to provide direct access to preventive care (cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants).
- Preventive services are already included in the RDH's scope of practice.
- RDHs can prevent dental disease and improve overall health for all Floridians.
- RDHs are educationally qualified and licensed to provide direct access to care (more college credit hours than RNs). The results of not receiving timely preventive and treatment services are dramatic, and can be devastating to overall health.

By making sure all Floridians have preventive oral health services available to them in their communities, we will have healthier and more productive citizens.

SB 490 and HB 1469 are about getting people preventive oral health care that they can't access now!

### ***Analysis:***

The original text does not clearly state the benefits to children of expanding the practice of registered dental hygienists, nor does it adequately convey that solutions are possible and doable. The revised version builds on the opening arguments, assuring the reader that "Florida can do better."

**(Thanks to Tami Miller at the Florida Dental Hygiene Association, for permission to use this example.)**