



## What Dentists Should Know about Head Start

### **Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood development program that provides a wide array of services to low-income children ages 0-5 and their families.**

- Head Start, which was founded in 1965 to improve the school readiness of poor children, serves low-income children ages 0-5. Infants and toddlers (0-3) and pregnant women are served through Early Head Start. In 2005, Head Start served 1,054,740 children.
- The four major content areas of Head Start are: education, health services, disabilities and family and community involvement.
- Head Start is a federal program administered through grants to local public agencies, private organizations, Native American Tribes, and school systems.

### **Head Start children receive important health services directly through the program or by a referral to another community resource.**

- Head Start programs are required to ensure that children receive immunizations, nutrition, dental and mental health care.

### **Head Start children are at-risk for dental disease.**

- Life conditions brought on by poverty can have a large impact on the importance families assign to dental care. Head Start helps families understand prevention and oral health care, along with the importance of establishing a dental home early in life.

### **Family involvement and support services are a central component of Head Start.**

- Programs build relationships with parents from the moment of enrollment by working with parents to create family partnership agreements that identify family goals, as well as strategies and timetables for meeting those goals.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards require that programs involve parents and help link parents to other resources in their community, like education, job training, mental health services and health education.

### **Research shows that Head Start is effective.**

- Children in Head Start have demonstrated increases in word knowledge, letter recognition, math skills, and writing skills in comparison to national norms, as well as gains in cooperative classroom behavior, reductions in hyperactive behavior, and improvement in other problem behaviors.

### **Head Start Focus on Breaking the Chain of Disease**

- A network of professional oral health consultants was created for the 12 EHS/Head Start regions. For more information, please click on the following link: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/HeadStart/RegionalConsMap.html>
- National Head Start Oral Health Resource Center at Georgetown University was created in 2006. Resources and training materials are available to Head Start programs. <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/HeadStart/index.html>
- The Office of Head Start funded Oral Health Initiative projects to promote collaboration and innovation at 54 Head Start/Early Head Start pilot sites across the country.

### **Dentists can get involved by:**

- helping families access Head Start  
Children are eligible for Early Head Start if they are between the ages of zero and three and if their families meet the federal poverty guidelines (\$20,000 for a family of four in 2006). To apply, families should contact the Head Start agency in their community at 1-866-763-6481 or at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/hsweb/index.jsp>
- accepting referrals of Head Start children
- establishing blocks of appointments for Head Start children in the summer and early fall months
- participating in local Head Start's Health Services Advisory [planning] Committees
- emphasizing preventive practices

### **Additional Resources for Dentists**

- National Head Start Association, <http://www.nhsa.org/index.htm>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Head Start, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/index.htm>