



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DENTAL PLANS

**FOUNDATION**

# 2025 GRANT PROJECT SUMMARY

During the 2025 grant year, the NADP Foundation supported three distinct projects that advance oral health access across the lifespan through research, community-based prevention, and care coordination for medically complex populations. These funded initiatives, led by Charm Economics, LLC, the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN), and Rady Children's Health - San Diego, reflect a shared commitment to addressing persistent gaps in oral health care through data-driven insights, innovative delivery models, and strengthened integration across health systems and community settings.

### **Charm Economics, LLC - Addressing Oral Health Needs**

Charm Economics completed a research initiative examining how older adults navigate dental coverage as they approach and remain on Medicare, with a focus on identifying persistent gaps in access to oral health care and opportunities for improvement. The project culminated in the publication of a white paper on the NADP website in May 2025 that provides timely insights into retiree dental coverage and the changing role of Medicare Advantage.

The research explores how dental benefits differ before and after Medicare eligibility, highlighting the challenges many retirees face as they transition away from employer-sponsored coverage. It also examines how seniors currently meet their oral health needs and documents the extent to which dental coverage remains unavailable for a significant portion of the older adult population. An estimated 31 million Americans lack dental coverage, including 19 million Americans over age 65.

In addition to describing current coverage patterns, the paper offers practical, policy-relevant recommendations to improve access to dental care for retirees. These recommendations are designed to address coverage gaps in realistic and achievable way.

Beyond the findings themselves, this project strengthens the broader conversation around oral health and aging by contributing credible, consumer-focused research to inform policymakers, advocates, and industry stakeholders. The work reinforces the importance of dental coverage as part of overall health and supports ongoing efforts to expand access to oral health care for older adults.



## **The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN)**

The Children's Oral Health Network of Maine developed Cavity Free Futures (CFF) to address a critical gap in early childhood oral health by helping families manage dental caries as a chronic condition. While access to preventive dental services has expanded in Maine, many families still need practical, ongoing support to adopt and maintain "mouth-healthy habits" that prevent tooth decay.

CFF adapts evidence-based caries management approaches for delivery by trusted, community-facing professionals such as community health workers, Head Start family advocates, and school-based health staff. Through motivational interviewing, goal-setting, and risk-based education, these partners support caregivers in understanding cavity risk factors and taking achievable steps to reduce them.

With support from the NADP Foundation, COHN developed and field tested a CFF coaching intervention and comprehensive toolkit, including risk assessments, coaching guides, educational resources, and training materials. Field testing across multiple community settings showed strong engagement from both coaches and families, with caregivers reporting increased confidence, improved oral health behaviors, and greater understanding of how everyday habits influence dental health.

The project also identified pathways to long-term sustainability by exploring reimbursement options using existing dental case management codes and developing a plan for a multi-site implementation pilot. All field test partners have committed to continuing with the next phase, and work is underway to create a web-based training module to support broader adoption. Cavity Free Futures demonstrates the potential of community-driven, family-centered approaches to strengthen early intervention, reduce oral health inequities, and promote lifelong oral health for children across Maine.

## **Rady's Children Hospital - San Diego**

Rady Children's Health, through its Anderson Center for Oral Health, worked to improve access to dental care for children with complex medical and social needs by strengthening care coordination, expanding preventive services in medical settings, and increasing community engagement. The project emphasized connecting vulnerable children to a consistent dental home while integrating oral health prevention into primary care.

A key component of the project focused on supporting families served by Rady's Enhanced Case Management and Care Navigation teams. Higher-than-anticipated demand led to the development of a new referral workflow that supports timely outreach, appointment follow-up,



and barrier resolution related to transportation, language access, and insurance. This approach often extended care beyond individual patients to include siblings, increasing overall family impact.

Prevention efforts were strengthened through training Children's Primary Care offices in fluoride varnish application, reinforcing the role of medical providers in early oral health intervention. Based on strong uptake, the Anderson Center began expanding trainings to additional pediatric offices and incorporated follow-up to support sustained implementation.

The project also emphasized community engagement through participation in health fairs and collaboration with dental residents to provide oral health education. Updates and lessons learned were shared with the San Diego County Oral Health Coalition. Building on this success, the Anderson Center is planning to expand oral health navigation services to additional patient populations, including children preparing for solid organ transplants, supporting long-term integration of oral health into comprehensive pediatric care.

## **Looking Ahead**

The NADP Foundation will support four grant-funded projects to be carried out in 2026. The selected project recipients were notified in December 2025 and will finalize grant agreements by January 2026, with project work expected to begin shortly thereafter. These initiatives focus on advancing sustainable dental billing and workforce training models, improving access to care and patient communication for vulnerable populations through digital intake and on-demand interpretation services, examining persistent barriers to care among children with dental benefits and piloting teledentistry as an innovative solution, and strengthening dental education through targeted training in insurance, benefits, coding, and billing for dental students.

The NADP Foundation's work is made possible through the generous support of individuals and organizations committed to advancing equitable access to dental care. Contributions are welcome throughout the year at [www.nadp.org/donate](http://www.nadp.org/donate). Donors of \$500 or more are recognized on the Foundation website as Foundation Supporters, while contributions of \$5,000 or more are recognized as Foundation Champions on the website and at CONVERGE, with the opportunity to participate in the grantee selection process.

