

TELLURIDE FOUNDATION

TELLURIDE – An ambitious new children’s dental program that could dramatically reduce cavities and enhance care for more than 1,800 kids in three Southwest Colorado counties has just been launched by the Telluride Foundation.

The San Juan Kids Cavity Prevention Program will reach into elementary schools and day care centers in San Miguel, Ouray and west Montrose Counties during the coming year to deliver preventive dental treatment and education based on a program modeled by The Forsyth Institute, a world leader in oral and dental research.

It is the first program in the country to implement the ForsythKids Cavity Prevention Program model outside of Massachusetts. The preventive care program is supported by a seed grant from the Caring for Colorado Foundation and is a partnership of The Telluride Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation, the Community Dental Clinic in Montrose and the Upcompahgre Medical Center in Norwood.

Starting in January, Naturita Elementary School became the first school where students received dental treatment that includes an oral screening, cleaning, fluoride varnish and sealants on molars. The services will be performed by dental hygienist Celia Clark using a portable dental field unit.

Children with cavities or other dental needs are referred to their local dentist. If they don’t have a home dentist, the Telluride Foundation will transport them to the Community Dental Clinic in Montrose, the only pediatric dental clinic in the area that accepts Medicaid and CHP+, said Gary Steinbach, the Foundation’s preventive health care administrator.

Another key component of the program is “entitlement enrollment,” Steinbach said. The goal is to enroll every child who is eligible but not currently enrolled in Medicaid or the state’s Children’s Health Program (CHP+). The Foundation also has funds available for children who are not eligible for Medicaid but whose parents can’t afford dental insurance.

“Our goal is to create a dental home for every child and see that they get the care they need, regardless of their ability to pay,” Steinbach said. In all, the program expects

to reach 1,820 students in the coming year and expects to enroll 50 percent of the children. Children from Paradox to Ouray will benefit from the service as the program moves from one elementary school and day care center to the next in the three counties.

The Uncompahgre Medical Center will administer the program, coordinating the transportation shuttle service to and from the Montrose Community Dental Clinic, entitlement enrollment and insurance billing.

The program is part of a National Institute of Health study and will be monitored from the start on an on-going basis to determine its effectiveness in preventing cavities and improving oral health care in children, Steinbach said.

The Telluride Foundation's guidelines for funding the project included selecting one that (1) was founded on evidence-based preventive dentistry and (2) would be financially sustainable by Medicaid, CHP+ and private insurance. ForsythKids, begun in 2003, fit the criteria. Developed by the Harvard-affiliated Forsyth Institute, it is a clinically effective school-based program that addresses the cavity prevention and oral health needs of children by bringing dental care directly to them.

The research-oriented program has more than 12,000 children in the Boston area under treatment. The Forsyth Institute claims that its preventive-care regimen reduces cavities by 50 percent after one treatment and eliminates new cavities altogether after three treatment rounds.

The Forsyth Institute was founded in 1910 to provide free dental care for children in Boston. Among its scientists' most notable achievements are the identification of bacteria that cause decay, the discovery of the role of fluoride in increasing resistance to dental decay, and the development of topical fluoride treatments still in use today.

The Telluride Foundation is a community foundation that matches philanthropy with community needs and opportunities to enhance the quality of life in the region. It also is a valuable resource to nonprofit organizations and provides support and training to make nonprofits more effective for their individual missions.

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