

ANOHC is a Resource to the States

The American Network of Oral Health Coalitions (ANOHC) is a network designed to support the work of statewide oral health coalitions across the country. Founded three years ago, ANOHC is a volunteer group made up of 28 state oral health coalitions. ANOHC was founded as a way to provide resources and technical support to state oral health coalitions, leverage best practices across the states, and engage in greater advocacy for oral health policy.

Over the last ten years, oral health policy has surged into prominence in the health policy arena, and state oral health coalitions have played a major role in that surge. Some state coalitions were founded by and based in state oral health offices. Many state offices recently have helped oral health coalitions move outside the state auspices in order to serve in a more independent capacity. In other states, the state oral health coalition was founded independently, often with support from state health foundations. While state oral health coalitions are founded in a myriad ways, they have a single purpose: to advance oral health policy in the state.

Because state coalitions include all the members of the oral health community in their state, they advocate for issues that appeal to the entire spectrum of oral health practitioners, educators, insurers and advocates. Such issues include community water fluoridation, improved Medicaid dental coverage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act. State coalitions also serve as public educators and promote oral health awareness among a wide variety of dentally underserved populations.

Funding for state oral health coalitions is challenging, regardless of the origin or the location of the coalition. Centers for Disease Control cooperative agreements have been a major source of operating funding for many coalitions. State or national philanthropy is another key source of operating revenue for some coalitions. Several also rely on membership dues, educational programs or special projects to support their work. Coalitions universally report that sustainable funding is a challenge that must be addressed on a continuous basis.

ANOHC provides its members a listserv, bi-monthly member teleconferences, occasional webinars, and an annual meeting in conjunction with the National Oral Health Conference. ANOHC has been working closely with the Children's Dental Health Project to develop a state oral health coalition comparison tool. Based on an early coalition survey developed by ANOHC, the comparison tool will allow coalition leaders to share resources such as bylaws, policy agendas, and strategic plans, as well as compare budgets, operating structures, and policy priorities. Through ANOHC and the comparison tool, ANOHC members should be able to build on the work of their colleagues without needing to reinvent the wheel when new challenges arise in their states.

ANOHC also has begun to represent its members at the national level by promoting policy positions all coalitions share. In particular, ANOHC has provided a great deal of member education about the Affordable Care Act and has lent its name to a number of national letters advocating fair implementation of the pediatric dental benefit.

Membership in ANOHC is open to statewide oral health coalitions that address the oral health issues of the entire state's population. For more information about how to join ANOHC , please contact Member Development Chair Karlene Ketola, kketola@mohc.org, or ANOHC board chair Tanya Dorf Brunner, tdorf@oralhealthkansas.org.