Strengthening the Oral Health Safety Net
Proposal Deadline: June 7, 2013

Background
An efficient and effective care delivery system is integral to achieving optimal oral health, by providing access to care when and where it is needed and by ensuring that limited care resources are used to maximum advantage to prevent and manage disease. For underserved populations, the system of safety net providers offers an environment that is linguistically, culturally, and financially accessible. Safety net providers improve health and oral health by offering comprehensive primary care and preventive services regardless of an individual’s income or insurance status.

Ensuring a strong and stable safety net system is vital to meet current and future demand for oral health care, however, many safety net dental programs struggle to maintain financial viability in an environment of operational difficulties and limited resources. The recently enacted Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act includes specific provisions to potentially expand the operational capacity of Community Health Centers to serve nearly 20 million new patients and to enhance medical, oral, and behavioral health services. Responding to this growth, safety net providers must strengthen their organizational capacity in order to meet the increased demand for services.

The DentaQuest Foundation invests in programs and initiatives that positively impact the following four systems:

- Public **policy** that supports improved oral health;
- Increased public and private **funding** for oral health initiatives;
- Improvement in the delivery of oral health **care** and prevention;
- Expanded **community** engagement on oral health issues.

These four systems are inter-dependent, with components that can generate new outcomes and powerful impact when mobilized effectively. The focus of this Initiative is the care system.
Past grant awards and programs of the DentaQuest Foundation and DentaQuest Institute have demonstrated the positive impact of strengthening the oral health safety net.

Since 2000, multiple DentaQuest Foundation investments in individual Community Health Centers in Massachusetts have strengthened their dental programs through capacity expansion, including equipment and staffing support.

Since 2005, the DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions has demonstrated that by employing targeted strategies that balance mission and business, oral health safety net providers can become more efficient, effective, and financially sustainable. The preservation and growth of existing programs and the creation of new service-delivery models and settings are creating a stronger safety net. http://www.dentaquestinstitute.org/safetynetsolutions/

A 2009 Foundation grant to the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers (MLCHC) signaled a shift from individual investments to a systems approach that has resulted in systems changes that have improved the efficacy of the safety net dental programs across the network of community health centers in the state. The MLCHC achieved these results by employing strategies that stabilized adequate oral health staffing at the centers, and promoted best practices of financial management and accountability, improvement of quality and efficiency of care, and development of technical assistance strategies focused on information system and technology needs.
http://www.massleague.org/

Beginning in 2011, the DentaQuest Foundation developed a grant relationship with the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) to build its capacity as a national oral health leader. As the national, unified voice for Community Health Centers, NACHC strategically addresses the needs of safety net providers by serving as a leader in the areas of research, education, training and technical assistance, and advocacy.
http://www.nachc.org

As a national resource to oral health safety net clinics, the NACHC has contracted with the National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA) to provide additional technical assistance to selected health centers to influence policy related to safety net dental programs, integration of oral health into primary care, and to strengthen and enhance safety net dental program’s ability to provide access to high quality oral health services.
http://www.nnoha.org

**Purpose**

The DentaQuest Foundation, though the Strengthening the Oral Health Safety Net Initiative, seeks to build national, state, and local capacity to preserve and strengthen the oral health safety net that serves the healthcare needs of millions of uninsured and underserved Americans.

**Vision**

Systems are in place at national, state, and community levels that support community health centers to provide care that results in optimal oral health outcomes for patients.
National Investment

The Foundation is pleased to continue a targeted grant partnership with NACHC, in contract with NNOHA, and MLCHC, as part of the Strengthening the Oral Health Safety Net Initiative, to build capacity within NACHC and PCA grantees to promote oral health with and on behalf of safety net providers across the country.

State/Regional Investment

As representative organizations of community health centers, state and/or regional Primary Care Associations (PCAs) provide training and continuing education, advocacy, joint-purchasing, and many other services on behalf of their members. They also provide a platform to sustain capacity-building efforts over time. Up to five (5) state/regional PCAs will be selected for grant awards to join the Initiative this year. Participating PCAs will be expected to partner with NACHC and its contractors to build their capacity to promote oral health as well as address issues of oral health for safety net providers across their states, by developing work plans to impact the SOHSN Priority Area Roadmap for Success:

1. **Promoting interprofessional activities among dental and medical programs in Community Health Centers.**
   - Medical and dental leadership are committed to and supportive of developing fully integrated CHCs
   - Interprofessional education and cross-disciplinary training build knowledge and skills to provide integrated care
   - Systems are in place to support integration (e.g. integrated EHR, referral systems)

2. **Elevating the importance of oral health within the PCA, and developing executive leadership at Community Health Centers to promote optimal oral health.**
   - A firm belief that oral health is essential to providing total health care exists throughout CHCs
   - The organizational structure is in place to involve and support dental leadership
   - CHCs have commitment from top down to support oral health

3. **Advancing safety net oral health needs at the state level.**
   - PCA and CHC staff are committed to understanding the implications of the policies, rules, and regulations that govern the oral health care and services they can provide to their patients
   - PCA and CHC staff are working towards protecting beneficial policies and removing policies that create barriers to optimal care delivery
   - PCA and CHC staff demonstrate a commitment to partnership and collaboration as they work towards policy change

4. **Optimizing the management of dental programs to provide sustainable and effective oral health care.**
   - PCAs and CHCs leverage partnership with SNS for statewide CHC dental clinic improvement
   - PCAs and CHCs are committed to establishing and supporting sustainable dental clinics that provide efficient, effective, evidence-based care

Community Investment

Each of the selected PCAs will work with the DentaQuest Institute to select up to five (5) FQHC affiliated safety net dental programs to receive in-kind, individualized technical assistance from the Institute’s Safety Net Solutions Program. Through tailored practice analysis tools and site surveys, the Institute’s Safety Net Solutions team will assess a wide range of operational elements, including financial and productivity data, revenue and expenses, services, payer mix, program leadership, billing, operations, policies, equipment, workflow, and culture. The goal of this approach is to provide programs with actionable strategies for enhancing sustainability, to increase access to quality oral health services, and to achieve financial viability. Impact data from Safety Net Solutions’ work with safety net dental programs across the country demonstrate considerable improvements in key practice metrics, including patient access, value of care provided, and net revenue, after improvement recommendations have been implemented.
Technical Assistance

As part of its commitment to be an active and engaged grantor, the DentaQuest Foundation has coordinated a technical assistance program along with its partners in this Initiative, NACHC, NNOHA, MLCHC, and DentaQuest Institute.

Technical assistance for PCAs will include two (2) in-person meetings per year as well as monthly webinars convened by MLCHC and focused, for example, on best practices to assist work at the state level to engage the community health centers in moving the oral health agenda forward, particularly in the areas of public policy, advocacy, and medical/dental integration.

PCAs will work with NNOHA and their member centers on issues related to improving oral health services in the centers by utilizing NNOHA’s resources to support safety net providers as they develop and implement changes in operations. PCAs will be expected to facilitate health center attendance at one in-person meeting and learning team meetings through monthly webinars for selected centers.

Safety Net Solutions will provide site specific technical assistance to the community health centers selected in each state. PCAs will be expected to work with Safety Net Solutions to develop a request for proposals process to identify centers that are prepared to select a member of executive leadership as a point of contact throughout the consultation process, do not have other major improvement initiatives underway, demonstrate readiness to receive assistance, and willingness to meet project timelines and deliverables.

PCAs will be expected to work with all partners in the Initiative to promote health center involvement in the technical assistance program.

Awards Process

The Foundation will select up to five (5) state/regional PCAs to receive grant awards to expand their capacity to support the oral health activities of their local members. Additionally, each PCA selected to participate in the Initiative will work with the DentaQuest Institute to select up to five (5) FQHC affiliated safety net dental programs in their respective states/regions to receive technical assistance from the DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions Program, furthering the Initiative’s local impact. Total awards to the state/regional PCAs, therefore, will consist of grant funds and in-kind technical assistance provided by the Institute’s Safety Net Solutions team.

Funding will be awarded as follows:

- **A total of up to $500,000 will be awarded for the 2013-2014 grant year:** Up to five (5) state/regional Primary Care Associations will be selected to receive up to $100,000 each in grant funds. Grantees will be eligible to request renewal funding for up to 2 additional years.

- **In-Kind Technical Assistance:** Selected PCAs and up to five (5) FQHC affiliated safety net dental programs affiliated with each state/regional PCA, will receive practice improvement technical assistance from the DentaQuest Institute’s Safety Net Solutions program.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must be based in the United States or its territories and may be either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code. In addition, applicant organization must be a state-wide or multi-state Primary Care Association.

Selection Criteria

The Strengthening the Oral Health Safety Net Initiative aims to build the capacity of national and state-based infrastructure to support and strengthen community-based safety net dental programs. Proposals will be reviewed, and grantees selected, based on the following criteria:

- Evidence of a commitment to partner with the NACHC, NNOHA, and the MLCHC to develop oral health capacity.

- Evidence that existing collaborations with safety net dental programs will be strengthened and/or new partnerships will be forged.

- Commitment to elevating the importance of oral health issues within the executive leadership of the PCA and
affiliated community health centers.

- Commitment to promoting interprofessional activities among dental and medical programs in community health centers.
- A demonstrated record of success in advocating for and advancing issues of importance to safety net programs at the state level, and a clear identification of critical policy issues within the state that will be addressed within the grant year.
- Commitment to integrating oral health into current training and educational infrastructure.
- Willingness to partner with the DentaQuest Institute to facilitate technical assistance to safety net dental programs within the state.
- Willingness to participate in robust technical assistance program including in-person meetings and webinars, and to facilitate member center involvement in all technical assistance support including one in-person meeting and monthly webinars.
- Clarity and practicality of the proposed activities including anticipated outcomes and potential impact on member centers, the PCA, and the community.
- Capacity of the organization to implement the proposed project and manage grant funds, including a clear dedication of staff time to the project of at least .5FTE.
- Feasibility of project achievements within the allotted timeline.

**Use of Grant Funds**

Grant funds may be used for related staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, related travel, and other program or initiative expenses, including a limited amount of equipment essential to the project. In keeping with the Foundation’s grantmaking policy, grant funds should not be used solely for general operating expenses. Foundation funds may not be used for capital expenditures, lobbying, endowments, scholarships, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

**Evaluation**

In evaluating the DentaQuest Foundation’s investment in the Strengthening the Oral Health Safety Net Initiative, we will seek to measure the impact of grantees’ activities on the four systems of Policy, Funding, Care, and Community, particularly as they relate to the oral health safety net. Grantees will be expected to develop metrics and monitor/measure their local impact on each of these key systems through grant funds. To support these efforts, the Foundation engaged an independent evaluation consultant, Harder+Company Community Research in 2011, to provide technical assistance to grantees to develop metrics and an evaluation plan for their individual activities.

In addition, the evaluation consultant has developed an overall evaluation of the Initiative, which will be supported directly by the Foundation. As a condition of accepting funds, grantees must participate in the evaluation process. Grantee participation will include assisting with necessary data collection (such as sharing experiences and lessons learned through interviews with evaluation staff, as well as survey distribution to member health centers) to accomplish the evaluation objectives.

**How to Apply**

To submit an application, please contact Matthew Bond: matthew.bond@dentaquestfoundation.org.

The DentaQuest Foundation’s online application process consists of easy-to-follow steps for grant seekers including online data entry, the preparation of standardized forms, adding required attachments, and saving an unfinished application to return to it later for completion and submission. An email confirmation will be sent to applicants confirming receipt of the submitted application. You may also print out a hard copy of your application for your records by pressing the print icon on your computer.