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May 10, 2024

For Immediate Release:

PPHD's Dental Health Program Successfully Completes 5-Year Challenge Grant with Nebraska Community Foundation

Panhandle Public Health District's Dental Health Program, Keeping Teeth Strong, began in 2017 funded through a Health Resource Services Administration (HRSA) grant through Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services Oral Health and Dentistry. When the grant ended just five years ago, PPHD received the exciting opportunity from an Anonymous Fund through the Nebraska Community Foundation of a 5-year challenge grant to continue to provide much needed preventive dental services to Panhandle children.

On Thursday, May 9, at a celebration at the Gering Civic Center, PPHD's Dental Hygienist, Kendra Lauruhn proudly proclaimed they have exceeded this goal with the help of local donors:

- Panhandle Partnership Innovations Fund
- The Thomas D. Buckley Trust
- George H. and Elta Spencer Thompson Foundation
- Fred Lockwood Foundation
- Ann and David Duey Charitable Fund
- Quivey Bay State Foundation
- Cow Country Health Foundation
- Snow-Redfern Foundation
- Eleanor R. Gardner Memorial Foundation
- Personal Donations- Julie Brock, Amber Brock, Cathy Lauruhn, Jim Gustafson
- Wyobraska Gives donors
- Mars-Wrigley Foundation Healthier Smiles Grant Program
- Fliesbach Family Foundation
- United Way of Western Nebraska
- Medica Foundation
- Health Resources and Services Administration- Oral Health Expansion
- Kimball Area Foundation
- First National Bank
- CAPWN Dental Clinic Partnership
- Parent Donations

Lauruhn shared how it's impacted area children and families, "We currently serve 33 public and private schools, 14 Head Start locations, and three private preschools. We offer the program to all the schools

that didn't already have an existing program and right now 98% of the schools have committed to having the dental health program in the next school year."

In the last five years, the program has provided:

- 21,088 dental screenings, which are critical because these can detect early signs of dental disease and determine the level of urgency for parents needing to get their child to see a dentist.
- 16,881 fluoride treatments which help keep teeth strong and prevent cavities.
- 4,455 dental sealants which are placed on the back molars to prevent cavities in the grooves of the teeth.
- 178 dental health presentations, teaching kids why teeth are important, how to brush, how parents can help, how to choose healthy foods, and what it's like to go to the dentist.

Lauruhn touted the importance of school nurses saying, "They send out and collect dental forms, work with the school administration and staff for scheduling, and round up the children. I could not do what I do without them. School nurses have the biggest hearts for the health of their students. They see children that come to their offices with teeth that hurt, and they value the dental health program. To all the school nurses here today, thank you for all your promotion and advocacy for the dental health program."

Dr. Charles Craft, Director of the Office of Oral Health and Dentistry for the Nebraska DHHS attended the celebration to share just how significant of an impact this program is to rural areas.

"Public health dental hygienists like Kendra Lauruhn at PPHD have demonstrated a significantly positive impact in the delivery of essential oral health services to underserved populations for more than 15 years. This program, and their outstanding dental personnel, are a shining example of what we hope every community in Nebraska can someday achieve to improve oral health outcomes for generations of future Nebraskans," said Dr. Craft.

He added, "This unique oral workforce averaged more than 100,000 dental services each year from 2017-2019. The recent Nebraska Oral Health Survey of Young Children report indicated that statewide dental experience rates for third grade children decreased from 64% in 2016 to 58% in 2022. Decay experience for rural third grade children dropped from 81% in 2016 to 65% in 2022. The dental disease disparity between urban and rural children has been significantly reduced."

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