



Emergency Room Dental Intercept

“Pay It Forward” Model — Calhoun County, Michigan

Dentists, community leaders and low-income residents of Calhoun County have partnered with Community HealthCare Connects to create a unique ER referral program that has significantly decreased ER visits for dental pain.

Step 1

Activity

Identify the unmet need or “problem” in your community.

Description/Notes

Emergency Room visits for dental diagnoses, waiting lists that exist in your community, turnaway information from dental providers, etc.)

The key is to identify that there IS a problem in your community with dental access. You need something measurable against which to mark your progress



Step 2

Activity

Identify who else cares about the issue.

Description/Notes

Hospitals, community funders, United Way, dental and hygiene schools, FQHCs, health/dental coalitions, free clinics, private practice dentists, retired dentists, hygienists, community nonprofits working in this area, etc.

This work cannot be done without a broad base of support. Don't limit your thinking ... identify anyone who might be interested in the work and get them excited and on board.

Step 3

Activity

Invite everyone identified in Step 2 to a meeting to share and talk about data with the goal of developing a program to meet the community's need.

Description/Notes

This group can't just talk about the issue ... at least some members must be committed to taking action, committing to follow-through, and moving the initiative forward. Suggested steps for this group include:

- Agree on baseline data
- Agree on your program's focus (fillings only, extractions only, urgent care, etc.)
- Agree on milestones and goals
- Choose coordinating organization
- Agree on roles (who will advise, who will act, etc.)
- Develop an action plan with dates
- Execute

Step 4

Activity

Talk to local private practice dentists (aim for 20% of all private practice dentists).

Description/Notes

This is the step in which you'll find out what matters to your dentists, which is almost the single most important thing you'll do, ever, related to this initiative. Only by finding out what matters to them, what bugs them, what bad experiences they've had in the past, etc., can you design an initiative that addresses their concerns. Only by addressing their concerns can you (1) entice them to come on board and (2) encourage enough excitement that they're willing to speak to other dentists about it.

Step 5

Activity

With dentist feedback, get group back together and finalize details of your proposed initiative.

Description/Notes

This is the point at which you'll take your community's information, the feedback from your selected "coordinating" organization, and the dentists' feedback and create your own initiative that is relevant and workable to all involved.

Keep in mind, if you've followed the steps above, you'll have gotten design feedback and excitement from funders, hospitals, FQHCs, free clinics, dentists, hygienists, etc. as part of the process. It's so much easier to implement and fund something when everyone you need has helped develop it!

Step 6

Activity

Go back to the dentists with whom you originally met; discuss your proposed initiative; see if you got it right.

Description/Notes

It's good to get a gut check from the dentists that gave you feedback originally to determine if the final design and all its related details is attractive to dental offices.

Step 7

Activity

Finalize initiative design from dentist feedback.

Description/Notes

Finalize your design; put it in writing; make it attractive. Create something that you're proud to share — something that others can use to talk about your idea.

Step 8

Activity

Ask for commitment from dentists (aim for 10% of all private dentists as a starting point).

Description/Notes

Begin with your most excited dentists; they are the ones who will advocate for you and remain engaged even when patients behave badly or something in the process doesn't work right.

Step 9

Activity

Launch initiative with small group of dentists and a handful of patients.

Description/Notes

Get started! Don't wait too long or the excitement will wane. Even if you just do a few people a month to get started, it will allow you to learn and adjust. It will also allow you to create some patient stories and have some early wins.

Step 10

Activity

Get feedback on how it is working; respond — revise — retry.

Description/Notes

Expect to continue changing ... forever. The learning, adapting, and changing never, ever stops.

Questions? Contact us!

American Dental Association

Jane Grover, D.D.S., M.P.H.

Director

Council on Access, Prevention and Interprofessional Relations

312.440.2751 or 800.621.8099 x2751

groverj@ada.org

The recommendations described in this document were compiled in collaboration with Samanta Pearl, Executive Director of Community HealthCare Connections in Calhoun County, Michigan.

For more information about ER referral programs and the American Dental Association's *Action for Dental Health: Dentists Making a Difference* campaign, visit [ADA.org/action](https://www.ada.org/action).

ADA American Dental Association®

America's leading advocate for oral health