

**Illinois****Creating Connections—Good Oral Health Is Good Health****Public Health Problem**

Without adequate surveillance data, states have a difficult time designing and evaluating their prevention efforts. Until recently, this was the case for Illinois. As far back as 1999, the Illinois oral health coalition, IFLOSS, identified a need for more community-specific data and began advocating for access to local data, a data collection system, and the expertise to analyze the data. Similarly, the Illinois Division of Oral Health's (IDOH) long-term goal was to provide accurate and timely oral health data to communities.

**Evidence That Prevention Works**

Timely health data provide a critical piece of the prevention puzzle. Public health experts use data to design and evaluate health programs and to target programs to those most in need.

**Program Example**

The needs and goals of both IDOH and the coalition were realized when the state received funding through a 2002 CDC cooperative agreement that provided resources to hire an oral health epidemiologist. Since receiving this funding, IDOH has built a respected surveillance system that not only is used by community dental health professionals, but also by other areas of the state's chronic disease prevention program. This has resulted in integration of the state oral health program with other chronic disease prevention program areas. For example, IDOH was able to collect children's obesity data along with oral health status assessments of third-grade schoolchildren, marking the first time the state was able to collect and use data on childhood obesity. IDOH also has been invited to review the next revision of PRAMS (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System), and was recently asked to participate in a revision of the Illinois Project for Local Assessment of Needs (IPLAN), a community health assessment and planning process conducted every 5 years by local health jurisdictions in Illinois. In addition, IDOH provides leadership to the Illinois BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System).

**Implications**

As a result of the new surveillance system, the Illinois Division of Oral Health has been able to forge important connections with other chronic disease areas, thus reinforcing the message that good oral health is critical for good general health. The creation of the surveillance system and integration within other chronic disease prevention programs will lead to better planning for Illinois prevention programs and, ultimately, better health for the citizens of Illinois.