



Pragmatic Framework for Addressing Oral Health Disparities in the Central Valley, California

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Abstract:

Purpose: This project introduces a framework for addressing oral health disparities. We explain how multiple influences on oral health operate and offer interventions that bring implications for more research and policy to reduce oral health disparities in the Central Valley. *Overview:* Oral health is an essential part of an individual's overall health and well-being. However, there is a lot of work needed to address this connection. Currently, significant disparities exist in the U.S. population regarding oral health because of multiple causes that include environmental, social, political and diverse cultural processes that affect both oral health and access to effective dental health care. In the Central Valley California, where there are complex influences, innovative approaches that address oral health are needed.

Methods: In partnership with the national Oral Health 2020 initiative, the Central Valley Health Policy Institute (CVHPI) collected 650 surveys from the Central Valley underserved residents to understand how they think about and feel about and experience oral health services. Findings were the foundation for our current and future selected issues. *Findings:* Oral health literacy, coverage, and access to timely and affordable quality oral health care were identified as barriers. To address literacy, we prepared and delivered oral health training for 50 Community Health Workers (CHWs) to empower them with the knowledge needed to improve oral health literacy in their communities. To better understand how to address access to oral health care issues in the Central Valley, we interviewed a group of dental providers that serve in the region. Additionally, we are exploring the current dental workforce in California and suggesting

alternative models that address access to care. We hope this work provides local stakeholders with the tools for inclusive policy change that addresses our regional health needs.