

Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program (ABCD)

Implementation progress report

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092; Section 211(51); Chapter 334; Laws of 2021

November 15, 2021

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Executive summary

Legislative references

The Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) program is helping children enrolled in Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) receive oral health care that contributes to long-term positive oral and overall health outcomes as set forth in RCW 74.09.395:

“(1) [t]he authority, in consultation with the office of equity, created in chapter 332, Laws of 2020, shall work with the statewide managing partner of the access to baby and child dentistry program to develop a local access to baby and child dentistry program fund allocation formula, key deliverables, and target metrics for increased outreach and provider engagement and support with the goal of reducing racial and ethnic disparities.” Additionally, it states “(2) [t]he authority, in consultation with the office of equity, created in chapter 332, Laws of 2020, shall collaborate with stakeholders to monitor progress toward the goals articulated in subsection (1) of this section and provide support to local access to baby and child dentistry programs and providers.”

In 2021, the Legislature passed the state’s operating budget to implement RCW 74.09.395 stating in Section 211(51) of ESSB 5092:

“\$200,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$200,000 of the general fund—federal appropriation are provided solely for contracting with the office of equity to implement chapter 293, Laws of 2020 (baby, child dentistry access). By November 15, 2021, the authority shall submit a report to the appropriate committees to the legislature describing its progress implementing chapter 293, Laws of 2020 (baby, child dentistry access) and chapter 242, Laws of 2020 (access to baby and child dentistry for children with disabilities).”

Substitute House Bill (SHB) 2905 (Chapter 293, Laws of 2020) and Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5976 (Chapter 242, Laws of 2020), directs HCA to expand the ABCD program to improve the program’s ability reduce oral health disparities related to children’s ages, race and ethnicity, and disability status.

Progress to date

HCA is collaborating with Arcora Foundation (the statewide managing partner of the ABCD program) and the Washington State Office of Equity (the Office) to implement SHB 2905 (2020).

- This includes developing an equitable fund allocation formula to support local ABCD coordinators in providing outreach and connection to dental care for children experiencing oral health disparities, as well as key deliverables and target metrics for increased outreach and provider engagement.

Efforts to implement SSB 5976 (2020) by updating the ABCD program’s state rule and billing guide, as well as University of Washington School of Dentistry’s training and certifying dental providers to treat children with disabilities, are on track.

By **January 2022**, HCA anticipates completing the work to expand the ABCD program and satisfy the requirements in recent legislation.

Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program

A lifetime of good oral health begins in infancy prior to the eruption of a child's first tooth. The relationship between good oral health and whole-body health is well documented. The earlier an individual receives access to dental care and education the more likely those habits will follow them throughout their lifetime, resulting not only in teeth free of disease but better health outcomes overall.

For some populations, receiving access to adequate oral health care during childhood is challenging. Children of color — including children with Latino¹ ethnicities or who are from Black, American Indian / Alaska Native (AIAN), Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI), or multiple racial backgrounds — tend to have higher rates of tooth decay compared to white, non-Latino children. Children with disabilities typically require additional health and support services, including oral health care. They also have a higher risk of oral health problems compared to children without disabilities. Without access to appropriate dental services, these populations' clinical needs and health inequities will remain, and often worsen.

Background

Current ABCD Program

Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 182-535-1245 defines the ABCD Program. The Legislature initially established the program to increase access to dental services for Apple Health-eligible clients aged 5 years and younger. Health care providers and local ABCD coordinators serving all of Washington's 39 counties identify and refer eligible clients to ABCD-certified providers, including dentists and primary care providers. The Health Care Authority (HCA) pays enhanced fees to ABCD-certified providers for furnishing ABCD Program services.

HCA contracts with the University of Washington School of Dentistry (UW) and the Arcora Foundation to train and certify medical and dental providers to participate in the ABCD Program, and to support ABCD coordinators in supporting clients, families, and providers statewide. HCA also contracts with local ABCD coordinators throughout the state to:

- Identify eligible clients and connect them to ABCD-certified providers.
- Provide an ABCD program orientation that includes supporting clients and families in need of extra support making and keeping dental appointments.
- Address obstacles to care, such as lack of transportation and limited English proficiency.

Program expansion legislation

Substitute House Bill 2905

In 2020, [the Legislature passed SHB 2905](#). SHB 2905 directs HCA to do the following, in consultation with the Washington State Office of Equity (the Office):

1. Work with Arcora Foundation to develop a local ABCD program fund allocation formula, key deliverables, and target metrics for increased outreach and provider engagement and support, with the goal of reducing dental disparities among children aged 0–2 years and children of racial and ethnic minorities.

¹ The Forecasting and Research Division in the Washington State Office of Financial Management refers to this ethnicity as "Hispanic".

2. Collaborate with stakeholders to monitor progress toward the goals above and provide support to local ABCD programs and providers.

Substitute Senate Bill 5976

Also in 2020, [the Legislature passed SSB 5976](#). SSB 5976 directs HCA to:

1. Expand the ABCD Program to include eligible children with disabilities until their thirteenth birthday. The current program includes children under the age of 6 years.
 - a. Pay enhanced fees for program services provided to eligible children with disabilities enrolled in the program to dentists, primary care providers, and dental hygienists certified to provide program services. To receive certification to provide program services to eligible children with disabilities, appropriately licensed dentist, primary care provider, or dental hygienist must complete a course on treating eligible children, as defined by HCA in rule.
2. Provide reports to the Legislature by December 15, 2020, and by December 15, 2021, including the numbers of dental providers participating in the ABCD Program expansion for children with disabilities and the numbers of those children receiving dental treatment through the ABCD Program.

Implementation progress

ABCD Program expansion to address age, racial, and ethnic disparities

HCA has created an interagency agreement between HCA and the Washington State Office of Equity (the Office) to define the consultative role the Office of Equity will provide to HCA as it implements SHB 2905 (2020). The interagency agreement indicates that:

- HCA will draft the ABCD program fund allocation formula, key deliverables, and target metrics for increased outreach and provider engagement and support with the Arcora Foundation.
- HCA will share those materials with the Office.
- The Office of Equity will review those materials and provide consultative feedback to HCA to inform HCA's efforts to reduce age, racial, and ethnic disparities through the ABCD program expansion.

HCA and the Arcora Foundation are developing the ABCD program fund allocation formula, which will allocate the \$400,000 budget appropriation for the 2021-23 biennium among the 27 ABCD coordinator contracts. Each contract will receive an amount to cover administrative overhead, based on the coordinator's local needs. HCA will divide the remaining funds between outreach efforts for children ages 0–2 years and children of color. The funding formula will use recent population data from the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to inform the outreach funding allocation among the ABCD coordinator contracts for these two populations.

In contract amendments that are currently in development, HCA will require the ABCD coordinators to:

- Attend meetings and training related to outreach work for children aged 0–2 years and children of color.
- Develop action plans and measurable goals for this outreach work.
- Connect with community health worker or other regional networks to facilitate outreach efforts for children aged 0–2 years and children of color.
- Submit reports to HCA about progress implementing outreach work plans and achieving measurable goals.

HCA will collaborate with Arcora Foundation to provide support to local ABCD programs and providers and monitor progress toward reducing Apple Health dental service utilization disparities in the target populations.

ABCD program expansion to include older children with disabilities

HCA is also working to implement SSB 5976 (2020) by revising WAC 182-535-1245 Access to Baby and Child Dentistry and the Access to Baby and the ABCD program's billing guide. The revisions will include the expanded population of children aged 6-12 years with special health care needs and will identify ABCD-certified dental hygienists as eligible ABCD providers.

The University of Washington School of Dentistry (UW) was awarded a federal Health Resources and Services Administration grant for a training program to increase access to dental care for Washington children with special health care needs. HCA has renewed its contract with UW, which requires UW to train existing and new ABCD providers (using the training program UW developed with federal Health Resources and Services Administration grant funding) to furnish dental services to children with disabilities.

In response to the legislative reporting requirements in SSB 5976, HCA submitted a brief report to the Legislature on July 22, 2021. That report included the following statement about the availability of ABCD dental providers and patient data:

"HCA does not have the data to report, because the ABCD program expansion has not yet occurred. Prior to expanding the program, HCA needed to receive approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to use federal funds for the ABCD program expansion. CMS provided that approval on April 26, 2021. HCA is currently developing rules for the program expansion before implementation occurs during the first quarter of calendar year 2022."

Conclusion

The ABCD program is helping children enrolled in Apple Health receive oral health care that will contribute to long-term positive health outcomes. Recent legislation, including the related budget proviso in ESSB 5092 (2021), as well as SHB 2905 (2020) and SSB 5976 (2020), will increase the ABCD program's ability to make a difference by reducing dental disparities related to children's ages, race and ethnicity, and disability status.

HCA is collaborating with Arcora Foundation and the Washington State Office of Equity to implement SHB 2905 (2020). This includes developing an equitable fund allocation formula, key deliverables, and target metrics for increased outreach and provider engagement and support for HCA's contract amendments with the ABCD coordinators. Efforts to implement SSB 5976 (2020) by updating the ABCD program's WAC and billing guide, as well as UW training dental providers to treat children with disabilities, are on track.

By January 2022, HCA anticipates completing the work to expand the ABCD program and satisfy the requirements in recent legislation.