



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MORE THAN 4,700 CHILDREN IN STATEWIDE UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL SETTINGS TO RECEIVE FREE ORAL HEALTH SCREENINGS THROUGH FUNDING FROM DELTA DENTAL OF COLORADO FOUNDATION**

*Innovation thrives as diverse sectors come together with a shared goal*

**DENVER (May 7, 2024)** — Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation (DDCOF) announced over \$1 million to eight local nonprofit organizations across Colorado to integrate oral health as well as screenings and referral within organizations providing universal preschool. The grantees include: Denver Preschool Program, Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families, United Way of Weld County, Early Learning Ventures, Early Childhood Council of San Luis Valley and ECHO & Family Center Early Childhood Council. Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) and Healthy Child Care Colorado (HCCC) were selected to lead the co-creation and implementation of this ambitious project, titled the “Healthy Universal Preschool Collaborative.”

ABCD and HCCC will lead a two-year project to create a proof of concept for how [child care health consultants](#), which are required by licensing for every child care center, can support integration of oral health through development and use of policies and procedures, information and resource sharing, and implementation of practices such as screening and referral. Integrating oral health screening and referral into early childhood settings addresses immediate dental needs and also lays the foundation for a lifetime of healthy habits and well-being. Our aim is to support oral health integration through growing knowledge and awareness, building supportive practices, and implementing screening and referral protocols within local communities and programs.

“Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation is dedicated to investing in oral health care for all Coloradans, and we see this is a remarkable example of how the business sector, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and local government can work together to improve outcomes for Colorado’s children,” said D.J. Close, DDCOF executive director. “Integrating dental screenings and referrals within Universal Pre-K is an opportunity to coordinate with child care providers and families to improve the oral health of children, some of whom may never have visited the dentist. We are excited to partner across the state to bring these needed services to families within their trusted child care location.”

According to a report from the [National Institutes of Health](#), 50% of American children do not receive regular dental care because of social, economic, and geographic obstacles. When children are unable to regularly access dental care, they lose vital learning opportunities. Elementary school students miss an average of 2.1 days of school per year in Colorado because of dental problems.

“We are thrilled to co-lead this significant and innovative project to build state, local, and program level capacity to ensure oral health education, support, and services are successfully incorporated into

universal preschool programs across these six geographic areas,” said Taran Schneider, executive director of HCCC. “This project is the first of its kind to engage the unique and critical role of child care health consultants directly in oral health education, screening, and referral services.”

“With ABCD’s long history of supporting holistic child development and resilient communities, we are excited to support universal preschool programs in improving their ability to ensure children and families receive equitable, reliable and timely child health information, services and supports,” added Eileen Auer Bennett, executive director, ABCD.

This investment is central to DDCOF’s commitment to funding preventive oral health care for children ages 0–6, which means a child has access to regular oral exams within a dental home and maintains good oral hygiene habits at home—practices that are key to improving overall health. ABCD and HCCC will be collaborating with the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment to roll out the program in fall 2024 with an estimated 160 Universal Pre-K programs serving over 4,700 children in schools, child care centers, and family child care homes across the state.

#### **About Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation**

Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation believes every person can have a healthy mouth regardless of life circumstances. By partnering with communities, the foundation works to re-imagine how all of our neighbors access, benefit from, and value the importance of oral health care. As a 501(c)(3) organization funded by the nonprofit Delta Dental of Colorado, the foundation intends to advance oral health equity throughout local communities across Colorado by implementing transformative programs and initiatives. To learn more about Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation, visit [www.deltadentalcofoundation.org](http://www.deltadentalcofoundation.org).

#### **About Delta Dental of Colorado**

Delta Dental of Colorado is a nonprofit dental benefits company with a mission to improve the oral health of the communities it serves. The nonprofit serves nearly 1.8 million members, providing them the ability to use and manage their dental benefits easily. Through its plans, dentist network, and expert customer service, the nonprofit makes dental care accessible, affordable, and simple, leading to a healthier smile and life.