

Mission of Mercy (*MOM*)

More than 100 million people in the United States are without dental insurance. Many suffer from what the Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, MD, PhD, called a “silent epidemic” of dental and oral diseases caused by “profound” disparities in oral health care. In the first ever oral health report by a surgeon general he stated, “the burden of (*dental*) disease restricts activities in school, work and home, and often significantly diminishes quality of life.”ⁱ

The need in Virginia mirrors that of the nation. The Virginia Employment Commission 2000 Population Project estimated that one in five Virginians live in an underserved area. Typically these are rural communities with a significant impoverished population. Individuals in these areas (*primarily the working poor, the elderly, the disabled, or the uninsured*) often do not receive any dental care and face extreme pain, discomfort, and embarrassment. Over three million Virginians are without dental insurance and only 71 of Virginia’s 135 localities have a dental safety net clinic.

In response to the lack of access to care and the resulting poor oral health of hundreds of thousands of Virginians, the Virginia Dental Association Foundation (*VADF*) launched the Mission of Mercy (*MOM*) program in 2000. This was a weekend dental fair in Southwest Virginia to help meet the overwhelming dental needs of uninsured area adults. This one time project was so successful that, as word spread, the *VADF* received requests from other communities, which wanted to have a *MOM* project too. As of 2010, there were 49 *MOM* projects held in Virginia, and 20 other states had started hosting them, as well.

“*MOM* projects are not intended to be the solution for providing dental care to the uninsured. Our long term goal is to leverage the *MOM* projects to create sustainable solutions so that in the richest country in the world, Virginians do not stand in line to receive dental care.”

-- Terry Dickinson, DDS
Executive Director
Virginia Dental Association

MOM projects are not intended to be a solution. They exist to treat dental problems that can be addressed in a day (*eg. extractions, cleanings, filling cavities*). At the same time, they bring visibility to the tremendous lack of availability of oral health care in Virginia.

MOM projects vary in size. The one in Southwest Virginia is a huge event that lasts an entire weekend (*2 ½ days*). Others last one or two days, depending on local need, capacity and resources. In all instances, volunteer oral health professionals and interested lay volunteers set up shop and provide dental care to local uninsured adults. The Southwest *MOM* project is run entirely by the *VDAF*. All of the others are led by a local organizing group in each community, with the *VDAF* providing guidance and the necessary mobile dental equipment and supplies, helping recruit dentists to volunteer, and working with the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry to provide dental students.

This implementation guidebook is designed to serve as a reference guide for assembling and conducting a one day MOM project in your community. It includes:

- An overview of the program;
- What needs to happen in your community before you partner with the VDAF;
- Descriptions of the manpower, equipment and supplies necessary to successfully conduct a MOM project;
- A basic public relations plan and sample media kit; and
- An index of needed forms.

Although the guidebook is geared toward a one-day MOM project designed to treat 500 patients, you can use it as a baseline if you want to expand or reduce the number of people served. Mostly, this is intended as a starting point. While all MOM projects share a common goal, they all must be managed and implemented within the context of the needs and resources of the particular community.

This guidebook is organized in four sections for ease of use.

Getting Started

This section highlights the key steps that must be in place before engaging the VDAF.

MOM Project Overview

This section is organized by the 'zones' present in all MOM projects; it provides a "big picture" view of the MOM, and highlights some of the details that can easily be overlooked when planning such a large event. It also includes details on volunteer recognition events, set-up and tear down.

Committees

This section is organized by committees; it explains the various volunteer leadership roles and tasks necessary to put on a MOM.

Index:

This section contains templates and forms used at other MOM projects so you and your committees do not have to reinvent the wheel. The forms are organized by committee and can be downloaded from the Virginia Health Care Foundation website – www.vhcf.org.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000

This guidebook is a collaborative effort. It would not have been possible without significant assistance from:

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Thank You!

We are continuously trying to enhance this guidebook. If you have used it to plan and conduct a MOM, please give us your feedback. Send an email to info@vhcf.org and let us know if the information was clear and understandable, and if there is anything that could improve it.