

Pandemic Response Workgroup Process Proposal for 2020-2021

While the Pandemic Response Workgroup (PRW) came together for precisely the reason imbedded in its name: to respond to the safety and infection control challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become clear that this group is well-positioned to take on a broader agenda, including elements of the much-needed oral health systems change work.

We saw at our September meeting that there is interest in broadening our focus to include six priority issue areas. Four of these are advocacy strategies, and the remaining two are more foundational issues.

The advocacy strategies are:

- Advocating for better oral health coverage in Medicaid and a dental benefit in Medicare
- Integrating oral health into overall health and amplifying interprofessional care
- Improving the availability of data and research by sub-populations to support better-informed policy decision-making
- Developing and deploying effective messaging about oral health

The underlying foundational issues are:

- Understanding the root causes of the obstacles to achieving equitable oral health in the U.S.
- Addressing structural racism in the oral health system so that we can move toward structural equity

This proposal outlines how we might do this work together in the coming year. Basically, we would form ourselves into four working teams, one for each of the advocacy strategies. We would undertake our work in those teams with an intentional approach that considers the two foundational issues – the impact of structural racism and the root causes that are obstacles to achieving equity in oral health. We would also continue to meet periodically as a whole group.

Purpose of our work together in 2021

The overall purpose of our work in this phase, so that we can contribute our collective voice and influence in service of making oral health more affordable and accessible to all, is:

- to continue monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on safety, infection control, and access, and to discuss action steps as necessary; and
- to broaden our focus and identify ways to have a collective impact on the prioritized advocacy strategies selected by the group.

Purpose of the Working Teams

The purpose of the Working Teams is to:

- understand the eco-system of the particular advocacy strategy so that the PRW can contribute to and amplify the work underway,
- bring an equity lens and root cause analysis to our understanding of the advocacy strategy,
- consider the strategy in the context of COVID-19 and the permanent changes likely to result from the pandemic, and
- bring back a set of recommendations to the PRW on progress, challenges, next steps, and actions to be taken.

The Audience

The audience for this work depends on the strategy, but essentially it is the entities that have the ability to make or impede the desired changes, for example, policy-makers, thought leaders, the provider community, the consumer community, advocacy organizations, and others who are engaged in the U.S. oral health system. Specific strategies for expanded stakeholder inclusion and targets for advocacy, as well as measures of success, will emerge through the work.

Working Teams

We propose that there be four (4) Working Teams, one for each of the advocacy strategies.

Formation

Each Working Team would be made up of those interested in contributing to the work on the specific issue. Some people will want to limit their efforts to a single team, and some might want to join more than one. Team members have the option of identifying one or two others within their organization with content expertise to participate in the team meetings. The teams would form over the next two months, by the end of 2020.

Each team would:

- decide on a convener from among the team members who would handle the basic duties of getting everyone together, hosting the calls, and providing in-kind staff support to the team, if possible,
- rotate the convener role periodically as the team sees fit,
- determine a meeting schedule, and
- make a plan for diving into the work.

The Work

We propose that each Working Team approach its work as follows:

- Identify key stakeholders to consult with to understand current activity within the eco-system of organizations, community groups, and experts already working on the issue.
- Seek out ways for the team or your respective organizations to contribute to, bring new voices to, leverage and/or amplify these efforts.
- Apply an equity lens to the work of examining the particular strategy: How do structural racism and the root causes of oral health system inequities operate in this arena, leading to disparities and poor outcomes? How can these forces be countered?
- When discussing possible approaches and actions, consider whether there is a “social case,” an “outcomes case,” and a “business case” to be made.
- Report back progress periodically to the whole group, including when there are opportunities for members of the larger group to engage in the work of the team.
- Create a proposed action plan for advancing this strategy and share it with the larger group.

Getting the Lay of the Land

We propose to invite advocates, activists, and experts in each area to present at the November, December, and January meetings of the PRW. The presentations will cover “the lay of the land” for each topic, i.e., work currently underway, stakeholders engaged, pending policies and legislation, and opportunities and challenges anticipated in the coming year. In addition, we will explore how structural racism and other root causes create obstacles to achieving equitable oral health in the U.S.

These “getting the lay of the land” sessions would happen in parallel with each of the Working Teams forming and organizing themselves.

The Whole Group

The PRW as a whole will continue to meet every other month in 2021 (January, March, May, July, September, November) to:

- coordinate around the evolving challenges of COVID-19,
- learn about progress, challenges, and opportunities for engagement from each of the Working Teams,
- cross-fertilize the efforts of the Working Teams for greater impact,
- assess our progress and impact,
- monitor the changing political, judicial, and regulatory environments, and
- respond to other challenges in the field as they may emerge.