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Spanish-Language Campaign Teaches Mothers Important Oral Health Care Skills

Comparison of pre- and post-campaign surveys shows significant improvements in oral health knowledge and behaviors among Spanish-speaking mothers

BALTIMORE, MD (February 25, 2015) – A social marketing campaign aimed at educating Spanish-speaking mothers about the importance of children’s oral health and teaching routine oral-hygiene skills has made a significant impact among Latinas in Maryland. Surveys taken before and after the campaign showed that more Latinas are better understanding the importance of oral health and hygiene, and are taking action to become properly educated on the topic, not only for themselves, but for their children.

Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos, launched by the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) and UnitedHealthcare in October 2014, was comprised of radio advertising on WLZL-FM (El Zol, 107.9) and transit advertising, as well as social media, media relations, community outreach and distribution of campaign materials including brochures and posters. Through these various channels, the campaign offered information on how to access care, prevent cavities and increase oral health awareness and behaviors among Hispanic women and children.

MDAC conducted pre- and post-campaign surveys to measure the campaign’s effectiveness – specifically, if campaign messages had reached their intended audience and if the messaging influenced the perceptions and behaviors of the women who heard about the campaign. More than 400 Latina women with children participated in each survey.

Results obtained by comparing the pre- and post-campaign surveys indicated that the campaign was highly successful. Almost all mothers (91.5 percent) heard about the *Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos* campaign, with 90.6 percent recalling at least one of the campaign’s messages. After the campaign, significantly more mothers (92.2 percent) believed children should go to the dentist before their first birthday, and 92.8 percent of mothers believed that dental health is an important part of overall health—both key campaign messages.

Following the campaign, more mothers (18.7 percent) had heard of fluoride and 71 percent more mothers understood its purpose; twice as many mothers had heard of fluoride varnish

after the campaign; and there was a 210 percent increase in mothers who had their children receive fluoride varnish. The survey also found that significantly more mothers (80 percent) drank fluoridated tap water. According to the CDC, 94 percent of tap water in Maryland contains fluoride. Fluoridated water has been shown to be effective in preventing cavities.

“We are pleased by the positive results of the *Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos* campaign,” said Margie Donohue, Executive Director, MDAC. “Based on the results and their statistical significance, it is evident that the campaign reached the target audience and had a positive effect on Latina mothers’ attitudes and decisions regarding oral health and the oral health of their children. This is an important step in improving the oral health of all Marylanders. We are grateful for the support we received from UnitedHealthcare, the Maryland Office of Oral Health and the DentaQuest Foundation. Without their support this would not have been possible.”

UnitedHealthcare worked with MDAC to fund the campaign, contributing \$25,000 to the airing of the campaign radio ads. The company was also an active partner in community outreach, helping to disseminate information and materials in the Hispanic community about the importance of children’s oral health. The Maryland Office of Oral Health funded creating and conducting the *Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos* pre- and post-campaign surveys, and the DentaQuest Foundation was also a supporting partner.

“The *Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos* campaign provided hygiene skills and education as well as a means to access oral health care for Spanish-speaking mothers through an effective, rewarding and educational experience,” said Mike Jones, CEO, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Maryland. “We are happy to see the positive impact this campaign has had on the Latina community.”

According to the CDC, oral disease is the most common chronic disease among U.S. children. Oral disease affects two out of every five children by kindergarten and accounts for 52 million lost school hours annually. Latino children are disproportionately affected by poor oral health and have a greater number of untreated cavities than middle class white children. In Maryland, Latino children are also less likely to visit the dentist and more likely to lack dental insurance than white children, according to the *Maryland Oral Health Survey of School Children, 2011 - 2012*.

Maryland Dental Action Coalition

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) is a community-based membership organization that is an incorporated 501(c) 3 nonprofit whose mission is to improve the oral health of all Marylanders through increased prevention, education, advocacy, and access to oral health care. It is the state’s leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, and was formed following the death of a 12-year-old Prince George’s County boy who died from untreated tooth decay.

MDAC has a well-established history of assessment and health communication activities. MDAC

works with a wide variety of stakeholders to develop and implement initiatives to enhance oral health for all Marylanders and monitors progress on the five-year Maryland Oral Health Plan (MOHP). The MOHP is designed to improve education and literacy, increase access and assure advocacy and policy implementation to advance oral health. For more information on MDAC and the MOHP, please visit www.MDAC.us.

UnitedHealthcare

UnitedHealthcare is dedicated to helping people nationwide live healthier lives by simplifying the health care experience, meeting consumer health and wellness needs, and sustaining trusted relationships with care providers. The company offers the full spectrum of health benefit programs for individuals, employers, military service members, retirees and their families, and Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, and contracts directly with more than 850,000 physicians and care professionals, and 6,000 hospitals and other care facilities nationwide. Globally, UnitedHealthcare serves 45 million people in health benefits and is one of the businesses of UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH), a diversified Fortune 50 health and well-being company. For more information, visit UnitedHealthcare at www.uhc.com or follow @myUHC on Twitter.

Maryland Office of Oral Health.

The pre-post campaign survey as well as the *Dientes Sanos, Niños Sanos* campaign is supported by the Maryland Office of Oral Health. The Office of Oral Health focuses on improving the oral health of Marylanders, preventing oral diseases and injuries and increasing access to oral health care. For more information on Office of Oral Health programs, please visit phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/oralhealth/SitePages/Home.aspx.

DentaQuest Foundation

The DentaQuest Foundation (DQF) is a national philanthropy focused on improving the oral health of all. The DQF invests in national and community based initiatives that engage communities to create conditions for optimal oral health through support of oral disease prevention, access to oral health care, and through partnerships with funders, policy makers and community leaders. Learn more about the DentaQuest Foundation and Oral Health 2020 at www.dentaquestfoundation.org.

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