



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FACT SHEET

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Teledentistry: Virtual Dental Home in Hawaii

Hawaii is borrowing proven, best practices from other states to make dental care more accessible for those who may not be able to easily go a dentist office to receive care. Using technology, Hawaii families can participate in a virtual dental visit from sites that are closer to their home or workplace and at convenient times.

The virtual dental home project, now entering its third and final year, is based on the success of a six-year demonstration project in California, which involved 11 communities and nearly 50 sites, and treated more than 3,400 patients.

This teledentistry project is part of the Hawaii Department of Health's strategic plan to increase the use of telehealth in the state to improve access to care. The California project has demonstrated the use of telehealth-connected oral health teams can reach people who traditionally do not receive dental care to deliver proven and effective prevention strategies. This program is now being replicated in Colorado and Oregon. Hawaii is one of the pioneering states to adopt the program, which is ideal for the neighbor islands since the majority of dental resources are concentrated on Oahu.

The virtual dental home uses technology to connect dental hygienists with patients at convenient community locations such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) centers, preschools, and schools with dentists who are in dental offices and clinics.

A dental hygienist uses portable imaging equipment and an internet-based dental record system to capture and upload patient information to a dentist who examines the patient virtually by securely reviewing the records and x-rays for a diagnosis and treatment plan. In addition to x-rays, a hygienist also collects photographs, charts of dental findings, and dental and medical histories for electronic records.

At the direction of the dentist, the dental hygienist completes preventive procedures at the community site and refers patients to dental offices for procedures that require treatment by a dentist. Since most of the care is provided in a community setting, this frees up a dentist to take care of more advanced oral health conditions in the dentist office. An important component of the virtual dental home system is education for patients, parents, and caregivers by a dental hygienist who is at the community site on a regular basis.