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EARLY CHILDHOOD ORAL HEALTH IN FIRST NATIONS AND METIS COMMUNITIES IN MANITOBA: GUIDING THE SCALING UP OF THE HEALTHY SMILE HAPPY CHILD INITIATIVE

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Background:

There is an urgent need to implement comprehensive and intersectoral strategies to reduce early childhood caries (ECC) in Canada. Healthy Smile Happy Child (HSHC) is a collaborative partnership that takes an upstream community development approach to engaging communities in ECC prevention strategies and promotion of early childhood oral health (ECOH).

Objective:

First Nations (FN) and Metis communities in Manitoba are guiding this project's activities with aim to build individual and community capacity (knowledge, awareness and behavior-change) to improve young children's oral health.

Methods:

Community-based participatory research is effective in engaging Indigenous communities in health transformation. Partnering with FN and Metis communities in the Spirit of Reconciliation, we aim to identify practices in Indigenous children's oral health, and adapt/assess the effectiveness and scalability of HSHC.

Adhering to the FN and Metis Principles of Collaboration, the Implementation Research Team (IRT) are conducting activities, including eight sharing circles/focus groups comprising 59 participants (parents, grandparents, Elders, community members, etc.) in 1 urban and 3 rural FN and Metis communities. Oral-health assessments of 400 preschool children are underway with parents/caregivers completing baseline questionnaires.

Results:

The project team is applying the knowledge gained from sharing circles/focus groups, oral health assessments, and baseline questionnaires to promote oral health and increase awareness of traditional knowledge and teachings and share existing knowledge and best practice recommendations for ECOH to foster community-based prevention strategies.

Conclusion:

Scaling-up HSHC is committed to culturally informed enhancements for both First Nations and Metis children in order to address the problem of ECC. Team members, stakeholders, and the participating communities are guiding the tailoring and enhancements of this intervention to improve the oral health and well-being of young First Nations and Metis children. The IRT will continue to promote meaningful engagements and relationships with First Nations and Metis communities.