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Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health Receives \$50,000 to Assess the Oral Health Status of Children in Rural Pennsylvania

University Park, Pa. – The Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health (PORH) has received \$50,000 grant to fund a project entitled “Oral Health Status of Low-income Children in Pennsylvania: A Rural/Urban Comparison,” designed to improve the oral health of children in rural Pennsylvania. The project is funded by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

Dental caries, also known as cavities or decay, continue to be the most common chronic disease in children and adolescents between ages six to 19. In children, dental caries are five times more common than asthma and 20 times more common than diabetes. Children from low-income families who also live in areas that have reduced access to oral health care providers are at a higher risk for developing dental caries.

Project activities will include documentation of the scope of the school dental screening programs; identification of the number of school districts that have school-based dental sealant programs; tracking of dental referral patterns and outcomes; dentist workforce analysis, with an emphasis on those who serve Medicaid and CHIP recipients; and an analysis of Medicaid claims data. The quantitative and qualitative data will be used to develop policy recommendations for the Pennsylvania General Assembly that can be undertaken at the state level to support access to high quality oral health services in rural areas in the state and increase the oral health status of residents of the Commonwealth.

PORH was created in 1991 to enhance the health status of rural Pennsylvanians and strengthen the delivery and quality of care in the communities in which they live. Located administratively in the Penn State Department of Health Policy and Administration, the organization compiles, analyzes and disseminates information to health providers, educators, policymakers and administrators; develops new and strengthens existing networks of rural providers, planners and advocates; develops, implements and assesses strategic rural health projects and programs; and serves as a liaison between academia, government, professional associations and the public in order to increase awareness of rural health issues throughout the Commonwealth.

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